

PERSPECTIVES

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Hi everyone and thank you for picking up and reading Edition 53 of Perspectives! This is Maryam and I's first edition as part of our tenure, and we are so happy to be able to share it with you. For this edition, we wanted to focus on the ever shifting and dynamic world of politics we find ourselves in. Elections, scandals, protests and so much more are bringing about immense change in the world and so for this edition we wanted to shine some light on just a few of the most recent revelations. Of course, for our UK readers, no change will be felt more closely than that of our new Prime Minister, Andy Burnham. Hence why our feature for this edition, written by Jack Keen, focuses on whether the new PM signifies a shift in the way we're doing politics in the UK. It really does take a village to produce a print so I'd like to extend a huge thank you to our wonderful team of Writers, Deputy Editors, Design Editors and Cartoonists. But most importantly, I want to thank you, the readers, for helping to give a voice to students at Warwick. Your support really does mean the world, and we appreciate any feedback or thoughts you have. I wish you all the best and hope you enjoy reading Perspectives Edition 53 – A Whole New World!

Maryam



Hi, and welcome to Edition 53 of Perspectives, made especially for Freshers' Week! As freshers step into an entirely new phase of their lives, it seems the rest of the world is doing the same. From the rise and downfall of political leaders to major shifts in long-running conflicts, today's political landscape is a never-ending today's political landscape feels like never-ending circus of disappointing outcomes and hopeful surprises. For this edition, Rhys and I wanted to capture some of the stories that best reflect both current political instability and renewal. Student protests in India, negotiations in Sudan, and British populism are just some of the topics explored by our talented writers. I'd like to give a massive thank you to everyone who helped bring this issue together — cartoonists, design editors, and you, our readers! Crafting this edition has been an incredible pleasure, and I'm excited to make more throughout this year. But for now, enjoy delving into a whole new world through our eyes!

DESIGN EDITORS

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US Midterms: The end of Trump?

Robbie Brown, 2nd year PAIS, Watford

The American midterm elections are often the chance for voters to take their frustrations out on the ruling party. This historical trend nicknamed the 'iron law', has been present in 18 out of the last 20 midterm elections, and 2026 is shaping up to be no different. The republicans are attempting to mount a campaign large enough to mitigate two years of discontent against the white house, however there is little belief that they'll succeed. Much like Biden's midterms in 2022, voters are expected to be angry about food prices, inflation and the current situation in the middle east. Democratic voters are expected, like the republicans in 2022, to come out in droves to vote against Trump and let out their discontent at the current regime, likely wiping out the republicans 'governmental trifecta' turning at least one of the two houses of Congress blue. However, how is Trump reacting towards this impending defeat, and how will this effect the last two years of his presidency?

The democrats are likely to take the lower chamber of Congress, the house of representatives, as all 435 seats are up for re-election, and the democrats only need a net gain of three seats to regain control. However, Trump and the republicans have attempted to at least mitigate the losses they might experience at the midterms by starting the premature redistricting of house seats in several states. While the democrats have attempted to fight back by redistricting states of their own, the republicans have managed to swing roughly nine seats that are now likely to vote republican. While the results will still likely be a victory for the democrats, it has narrowed the number of seats that are genuinely contestable in this election, with toss ups mainly being in rust belt areas such as Michigan, Pennsylvania, and North Carolina.

The prospect of losing the lower house should be a cause of concern for Trump, it would be any normal president, as it would hinder his ability to pass legislation through Congress and force compromises on policy, a seemingly huge blow to the administration. Also, the democrats would have control of congressional committees, likely starting a programme of aggressive oversight of Trump's administration. However, Trump is no ordinary president; he would likely ignore democratic committees, outright refusing to cooperate with democratic leadership. I have

every belief that Trump would use his presidential executive orders to circumvent the lower house, and if in the most likely case there is a split Congress, it is unlikely that any executive orders would be vetoed in a republican controlled senate.

In the upper house of Congress, the American senate, Democrats' path to victory is significantly narrower as, due to senators staggered six year terms, only 35 out of 100 senate seats are up for election. Out of these 35 seats, the Democrats must have a net gain of no less than four seats to take control, any less and the republicans would still have the advantage. Therefore, for any victory to be possible, the democrats must take seats in states that voted for Trump in 2026. This is important as it will show the White House how significant the rebellion is on Trump as a whole. Polls and projections currently have roughly five seats as toss ups which the democrats must gain to hold any chance of winning.

However, democratic hopes of controlling the senate were pushed back when democratic senator John Fetterman appeared at the republican convention, endorsing republican Dave McCormick, escalating rumours that he might defect. While he denies such claims, this appearance shows how delicate the balance of power sits in the senate. The democrats must appear unified to be a viable option for voters which is a tough task for the leadership in an era where many grassroots democrats are leaning further left, a trend that has not yet spread through the whole of Congress.

Now the main question at the heart of these midterms is, how would this effect Trump? My opinion? Not much. Trump currently seems almost indifferent about the possibility of a 'blue wave' in the midterms, and I think he's right to be. Congress's only weapon to control the president is the threat of impeachment, however for this to pass, the democrats would not only need control of both houses of Congress, but also a two thirds majority in the senate, a near impossible challenge. There is always a possibility of Republicans joining the Democrats in voting for Trump's impeachment; however, this seems highly improbable. After all, only seven republicans defected to convict Trump after January 6, leading me to wonder what Trump would have to do for republicans to break ranks and call for him to go.

Overall, I cannot see the president changing direction no matter the outcome on November 3. In the looming defeat that is likely to come, Trump will still push on, using every executive and legal power at his disposal to maintain his position as a quasi-autocrat. Trump will still have the power of a heavily stacked supreme court in his favour, and enough loyal republicans to rule out any threat of impeachment. With defensive legislation slow in the cogs of democracy, Trump will be able to press on with his agenda, in who knows what direction? Whatever happens, this election is certainly one to watch.



Baited by Verbatim: yet another financial scandal hits Reform UK

Eliza Oliver, 2nd Year Politics and International Studies, Winchester

It is no secret that monetary scandals have plagued the Reform UK Party since their first MPs were elected in July 2024; therefore, the revelation that the Reform Party is embroiled within a further donation scandal does not come as a surprise.

On September 3, 2026, Channel 4, with footage from Verbatim Investigations (a group founded by the Centre for Climate Reporting) aired a documentary, discussing possible donations to the Reform Party through questionable methods. The publication of this documentary has since led to the resignations of Head of Policy, James Orr and Senior Aide to Nigel Farage, Dan Jukes.

The documentary entailed covertly filmed discussions in which one of Verbatim's investigative journalists posed as the British son of a potential American donor over the course of a year, willing to send his father's money to the Reform Party to bypass laws related to donations to political parties. In the United Kingdom, it is against the law for a non-UK citizen or company to donate to a UK political party.

At the point of this exposé's release, the Reform Party had already received £32,500 through this questionable method of donation, to be spent on 3 polls and were in discussions to receive a further £500,000 from the undercover journalists. To further complicate matters, these polls were released to several British media institutions, including the newspaper The Times, without any disclosure that the polls in question were commissioned by the Reform Party, potentially breaking the law in relation to the Political Parties, Elections and Referendums Act 2000. To further effect, these polls allowed Reform to solidify their support ahead of the local elections in May 2026.

As aforementioned, this is not the first time the Reform Party has found itself immersed in financial trouble. Nigel Farage, the party's leader, recently resigned from his seat in Clacton-on-Sea when questions arose about the nature of an unannounced £5 million donation to Farage from Thai billionaire Christopher Harborne. He claims that his resignation and subsequent re-election to his seat signified voters denying the 'Westminster' image of him as "a thoroughly dishonourable and dishonest person".

Robert Jenrick, a Reform UK MP and Spokesman for the Treasury, has also been scrutinised for his handling of financial matters. He was accused to have accepted £37,500 from a US Businessman during his attempt to become the Conservative Party's leader before his defection to the Reform party, further showing the extent of the financial accusations levelled at the minimal number of Reform MPs.

These new allegations against the Reform Party will act as a continuation of the ongoing investigations, both within Parliament and by the Metropolitan police, into their funding before July 2024, into the donations from Christopher Harborne and the actions of Nigel Farage's close associate George Cottrell. Despite a wealth of evidence on the contrary, the Reform Party "denies any wrongdoing and will fully cooperate with the investigation." This will occur alongside the parliamentary standards investigations into the undeclared £5 million gift from Christopher Harborne.

Furthermore, Nigel Farage insists that, despite being an active member of several conversations shown in the Channel 4 documentary regarding the sourcing of their funding, he was not listening during pivotal discussions regarding methods and amounts of donation, showing some unwillingness to accept responsibility. By doing this, he is instead pushing the blame closer towards those who have already resigned: Orr and Jukes.

Thus arises a pivotal question; will this newest donation scandal spell disaster for the Parliamentary Reform Party as we know it? By several metrics, it could cause havoc for the future of the Reform party. In regard to the £5 million donation scandal, if Nigel Farage has breached the parliamentary code of conduct, his punishment could be as severe as complete suspension from Parliament. The Reform Party, in contrast, seems keen to brush all accusations under the rug, with Farage dismissing Verbatim's undercover investigative journalism as "an exercise in entrapment", and further arguing against the Parliamentary investigation since he has re-gained the support and mandate of the voting population of the Clacton-on-Sea constituency.

Verbatim, in contrast, has clearly stated their willingness to cooperate with the police investigation.

In the wider Parliamentary sphere, the Liberal Democrats have reported the UK to the police over their donation's debacle, with a spokesperson stating that "we welcome the Met police's criminal inquiry into their finances, and if proven, Nigel Farage and his cronies should face the full force of the law." Bridget Phillipson, the Labour Minister for Women and Equalities, has argued that "Farage needs to wake up and realise the buck stops with him." Furthermore, the leader of the Green Party of England and Wales, Zack Polanski, stated that "Nigel Farage and Lee Anderson hoped they could pin all this on two of their most senior advisors." This widespread condemnation of the actions of the Reform Party could demonstrate a wider movement against the Reform Party's favour.

The acceleration of the police investigation into the nature of Reform's history of donations and spending habits does not bode well for the future of the party. By all means, these scandals are highly capable of causing damage to their credibility and strength as a viable political candidate in upcoming elections, both local and national.

MAGA's Forever War: Why Trump Won't End the Iran

Eliza Oliver, 2nd Year PPL, Shropshire

Since early 2026, Trump's America and his greatest ally, Israel, have led a campaign against the Islamic Republic of Iran, claiming that their offensive was in the name of altruism, to liberate the people of Iran from an evil regime, and to protect the rest of the world from the Iranian government developing nuclear capability.

Whether that's a justifiable excuse is disingenuous, certainly, but the motives behind this war have become essentially redundant, for the conflict is little more than a proxy war. In fact, this campaign would be better described as an ideological front, a vehicle for the MAGA movement to further its grasp over American politics. The battleground may be based in Iran, but the war is increasingly being fought over what America itself is "supposed" to be.

So, what exactly does American conflict with majority Islamic states actually do to transform perceptions of Trump's leadership and his version of the Republican Party? To begin, the War on Terror never really ended in the eyes of committed Republicans, because, even after the assassinations of multiple opponents in the Middle East, the supposed threat never faded away. After all, if there's an enemy to be blamed for any failings of the American government, then responsibility never really needs to be taken.

Of course, currently only 37% of Americans actually support Trump's war on Iran, mostly as a result of exponentially increasing fuel prices, so that narrative isn't exactly working too well for the current administration. Additionally, the MAGA movement gained popularity because it was meant to be "America First", promising to transform America into an anti-interventionist state, a far cry from the globalist peacekeeper role it had once assumed. Fighting unwinnable wars in foreign lands is inherently not America First.

Thus, considering that ideological tension, why won't Trump end the campaign in Iran, as he's so often promised to do, ceasefire after ceasefire? Well, this conflict can easily be reframed as one of ideological importance, protecting America from a threat to its very existence, therefore putting America first.

How? The MAGA movement is built upon Christian fundamentalism, and so Islamic fundamentalism, or rather what Trump portrays as Islamic fundamentalism, can be presented as a direct risk to preserving American traditionalism. Never mind that Iran, or any state in the Middle East, hasn't attempted to invade America, and that Trump is the main aggressor in this situation.

Further, before the Islamic Republic took control of Iran in 1979, Iran had been a vital Cold War ally of America, partially because American forces helped to install the previous authoritarian regime in Iran. After that relationship ruptured, Iran managed to become a symbol of American weakness, proof that America wasn't all-powerful in the Middle East. Sure, America does have some power in the Middle East because of Israeli ties now, but Israel itself is weaker day by day. So, if Trump continues to attack Iran, that can be interpreted as America claiming back dominance over a volatile region. It's very much all about perceptions, rather than reality, in Trump's America.

But if the Republicans don't perform well in the upcoming midterms, could that persuade Trump to seek peace in the Middle East? Frankly, that doesn't look likely. Given that Trump is often viewed as a raging egomaniac by many, driven purely by the idea he can play God with both America and the rest of the world, to end this conflict purely because of electoral discontent wouldn't be consistent with his leadership. Instead, Trump, and his potential (Republican) successor in 2028, will continue this conflict to demonstrate that they are the true leaders of the Free World, and that their mission goes beyond social approval, and is truly a campaign for world freedom.

Therefore, this conflict will go on, and on, and on, until the Republicans can claim that they've destroyed this Iranian symbol of American weakness. How that reflects in the polls is not of importance, for the MAGA movement has long since moved away from appeasing the majority. The MAGA movement has seemingly imploded into a megalomaniacal facade of American identity, and so defeat, or even compromise, will not be considered. The Iranian conflict will become MAGA's forever war, and potentially the one to destroy their grasp over America. After all, populism cannot survive if the people no longer subscribe to its lies.



There's A Storm A-Comin': Just Not How You Expected - Is the world properly prepared for the strongest El Niño in decades?

William Raven, 3rd Year History, Cambridge

As Europe stumbles, red-faced and irate, out of a summer composed of never-ending heatwaves and the joint-hottest months ever recorded, the Met Office is "very confident" that an even bigger event is coming. The cooling rains of early-Autumn may have brought relief to many across our parched isles, but around twelve-thousand-kilometres from London an emerging "super weather event" is set, ready and menacing, to push global average temperatures up by a further 0.2 °C and initiate a host of other weather impacts around the world. According to Professor Adam Scaife, one of the Heads of Prediction at the Meteorological Agency, this year's El Niño "may even be a record event", with global consequences, that we are only just beginning to witness unfold.

It was on July 31, 2026, that alarm bells had already started ringing in the UN headquarters as Secretary-General António Guterres declared alarmingly that "El Niño is strengthening – adding fuel to a planet already on fire." Such warranted concerns, from scientific and political communities alike, related to the natural and cyclical weather events that form when a reverse in wind patterns sends rapidly spreading warm waters across the Pacific Ocean in a phenomenon commonly known as El Niño. Indeed, somewhere deep beneath the Pacific's surface, a vast submarine heatwave had already begun to move in early-2026, bringing temperatures 6°C above average to the depths of the Eastern-Pacific. This vast wave had already been creeping eastward for months but, by all predictions, will not stop until the new year begins. A slow-motion harbinger, echoing the wider climate crisis itself, is now beginning to rear its ugly head far, far away from the UK.

The primary concern for scientists and decision-makers remains that deep-ocean heat almost always precedes the surface temperature spike that is still yet to come, and without concerted global efforts to mitigate its effect, these changes will be felt with even greater ferocity than usual. What began this year as no more than a 62% probability of El Niño even emerging at all has, by September, hardened into near certainty, with the World Meteorological Organization now rating the odds that the "super El Niño" will persist through till February 2027 at nearly 100%.

While the warnings and the numbers keep growing the need for considered preparation must also increase, otherwise this year's exceptional El Niño will have consequences of even greater effect than most have predicted.

NOAA's Climate Prediction Centre puts the chance of this El Niño outstripping every event recorded since 1950 at 69%, with a greater than 90% likelihood it reaches a "very strong" intensity this winter. The US Geological



Survey, an organisation reaching further back than most, has floated the possibility that this could rank among the strongest El Niño events in more than a century and a half. Each agency remains tight-lipped about the consequences of such an event, but if the data is any indication, it shall be far from good. In a world of such instability, reversing the natural climatic conditions of the globe's biggest ocean spells confusion at the best of the times and, especially now, chaos at the worst.

The summer months have already witnessed global average temperatures 1.65°C above pre-industrial levels, pushing past the very thresholds the Paris Agreement was originally built to defend. The data is irrefutable evidence of the world's destructive fossil fuel addiction and its spiralling price on the planet and us all. Yet concerning researchers say El Niño's own contribution to global temperatures has barely begun, meaning the various meteorological records that have already tumbled this year may yet be broken again and again.

It is tempting, to file all this under a dusty report on distant meteorological trivia. Yet as the United Kingdom, like many others, continues to aggressively cut its foreign aid budget, the World Food Programme ominously estimates that this El Niño could push nearly fifty million people into acute hunger. This would constitute a rise of more than a fifth on current numbers, with West and Central Africa alone facing 7.4 million additional people at risk of food insecurity. If more-privileged states, particularly in the global-West, continue to fail or wilfully refuse to act, it is in other parts of the world, such as in regions of sub-Saharan Africa, where people will measure the drought not in degrees gained but in how many fewer meals they can put in front of their children.

Economists warn of the "mild 'stagflationary' impulse" starting to ripple through global coffee, cocoa, and sugar markets that in due course could also end up arriving at North American and European checkouts. Nevertheless, the magnitude of El Niño does not translate directly into the scale of its damage. The effects of a "super" El Niño aren't just felt in the short-term events themselves but in cascading long-term impacts years down the line. That caution is warranted, and worth remembering amid the more apocalyptic headlines that will inevitably spring from the same presses that are simultaneously championing further fossil fuel exploitation at home, particularly in the North Sea. This may all be cold comfort, however, when as Guterres stated in July, "the warm-up is over". As climate breakdown accelerates, what comes next, record El Niño or not, is still largely out of our hands to predict.

Burnham: The Prime Minister bringing humanity back to Westminster

Jack Keen, 2nd Year, PAIS, Hemel Hempstead

Too often in politics, we get caught up in the analytical side of policy.

We can be overly quantitative about difficult choices, often forgetting what is right and what is wrong. As someone who has followed politics closely for years, this has been a point of constant cynicism.

A couple thousand jobs here.
A few hundred lives there.
A billion or so spent on that.

Often it is easier to disassociate policy into numbers than to hear the human side of issues. Politics has become too comfortable translating human consequences into abstractions.

Some may argue this is the best way to approach politics. Numbers are, after all, objective.

To those people I say this:
Statistics show that austerity has contributed to 330,000 excess deaths between 2012 – 2019. Yet even that shocking number cannot convey the full tragedy of lost jobs, stress-induced health problems or hours wasted on taking the longer route because a bridge couldn't be built, and the ensuing children's recitals that were missed.

Policy changes do in fact have real-world impacts—often emotional ones.

But that emotion and humanity are often lost in politics. For me, no policy demonstrates this as well as foreign aid as a percentage of GDP.

0.3%, 0.5%, 0.7%. What does it matter? It is just a number, is it not?

What we don't see is the millions of emergency meals it delivers onto the table for thousands of people around the globe. We don't see the number of children now living into adulthood without the fear of malaria due to funded vaccine programmes. We don't see the prevention of civil wars breaking out because people have access to basic amenities like clean water or shelter.

Aid provides an often-underappreciated protection against the worst the world has to offer.

Countless lives are saved and drastically improved. Not only does aid buy the UK influence around the world, but it actually makes it a better place to be in.

And yet it can just be easier to express it as a single cost figure - £14.08 billion in 2024.

This is not all to say that politics is inherently heartless, but to demonstrate that the personal experience is too often forgotten amid busy schedules, competing priorities and the drama of political fighting.

This is why I welcome the advent of an otherwise unconventional figure like Andy Burnham.

Our new Prime Minister is rumoured to increase GDP spending to 0.7% at the next budget. For me, this represents perhaps the best part of Andy Burnham's return to parliament.

A greater emphasis on compassion in the House of Commons. The qualitative experience of people, rather than bureaucratic, has a greater place at the heart of democracy.

We can perhaps attribute some of Burnham's attitude to his more than a decade spent outside Westminster. Instead of the usual murky political view across the Thames, Burnham provides a personal view built from time spent on the ground connecting with people as mayor of Manchester.

Even Burnham's rhetoric and communication style have been hyper-personalised. Often talking one-on-one to a camera, answering questions on Reddit and doing more personality-based content such as "rating favourite pub snacks". Burnham is keen to show that he is not just a Prime Minister; he is a person, one who hears you and understands your pain.





And foreign aid is not the only indication that something has changed.

Since entering Number 10, Burnham has placed social care as a priority for his government. The PM has spoken of building up the social care workforce, improving pay, training and job security, and increasingly treating NHS and care staff as one workforce.

Rather than seeing social care as yet another problem on the Treasury balance sheet, Burnham's approach has put the people providing and receiving care back at the centre of the debate.

“It can break people if they’re left without the support that they need.”

“What we need is a new way of doing politics where we come together, face the challenge head-on and build an integrated system that gives people security and dignity.” Then there’s homelessness. An immediate priority announced before Parliament even returned from recess. Burnham is promising that everyone rough sleeping in England will be offered a route off the streets by Christmas.

A bold commitment, and one rooted in the understanding that homelessness is not always a choice. Objectively, a rough sleeper offered somewhere safe to stay might barely register against Britain's wider economic statistics. And yet, to that person, government intervention can change the entire trajectory of their life.

There has also been a flurry of other policies.

VAT on energy bills has been scrapped, the £2 bus fare cap reinstated, business rates cut for pubs, clubs and live music venues, billions allocated for new council and social housing, and new technical education routes announced for young people.

These policies are all targeted to improve the day-to-day of individuals and businesses, especially in exceptionally trying economic times.

All of this demonstrates that within his first few weeks, Burnham has been consistently placing the personal experience at the centre of why policy needs to change.

Many of his plans, like ending rough sleeping or fixing social care, have the genuine potential to make monumental change in people’s lives. During a time when every party is placing blame for a broken state, Burnham is setting forward a plan to fix it, whilst making sure that lived experiences are at the centre.

Politics will always need numbers, but Burnham’s first weeks are a reminder that the people behind them matter more.

And in my opinion, the bold and the personal are where politics can enact the most good.





The Mamdani Experiment: How far left can America really go?

Maryam Munshi 2nd Year PAIS, Singapore

Almost a year ago, New York City elected a bicycle-riding superhero as its mayor. Zohran Mamdani's victory as the City's first Muslim and first Asian-American mayor, at just 34 years old, signalled a shift in what was politically possible within Donald Trump's America. He had campaigned on one deceptively simple promise: to make the country's most expensive city affordable. By infusing socialist ideas from the margins of the Democratic Party into the heart of New York, his administration has expanded the role of government in the everyday lives of New Yorkers.

Housing

For a city where more than half the residents rent their homes, housing is perhaps the clearest test of Mamdani's campaign promise. On June 25, the city's Rent Guidelines Board approved his pledge to freeze rents for one million rent-stabilised apartments, setting increases at 0% for one and two year leases from October 2026 to September 2027. This policy marks a clear departure from that of his immediate predecessor, Eric Adams, who approved increases of up to 9% for rent-stabilised tenants during his tenure. The appeal of Mamdani's policy is fairly straightforward. For tenants already struggling with housing costs, keeping rents unchanged offers immediate financial aid and greater certainty over what they will pay.

The majority of the backlash for the rent freeze comes from property owners. They still face rising maintenance costs, which could discourage repairs and push smaller landlords to sell or abandon their properties. Economic analysts also highlight that a freeze can discourage tenants from moving if doing so means giving up a protected rent, potentially creating a wider divide between regulated and market-rate housing. Nonetheless, with more than 51.6% of NYC renters being rent-burdened, meaning they spend more than 30% of their income on housing expenses, many citizens considered the policy a necessary relief measure. A freeze was last introduced by former mayor Bill de Blasio between 2015 and 2021, for one-year leases. Despite the criticism he has received, Mamdani's approach, in this case, is aligned with the broader Democratic party.

Childcare

A more ambitious part of Mamdani's agenda is his expansion of free childcare. On March 30, his administration secured a \$1.2 billion agreement with Governor Kathy Hochul to expand free childcare for two-year-olds, starting with 2,000 seats in the first year and 12,000 the following year, with the goal of reaching every two-year-old by the end of his first term. In August, the administration went further, eliminating out-of-pocket childcare costs for 22,000 low-income families already receiving city assistance. Whereas, Adams, during his term, only allocated \$167 million in permanent funding for early childhood programmes after facing criticism over cuts to preschool childcare. Mamdani has also begun bringing his vision into the workplace. In April, the city opened applications for its first free, on-site childcare centre for municipal workers, located in the Municipal Building. The centre saves working families upwards of \$20,000 a year in childcare costs.

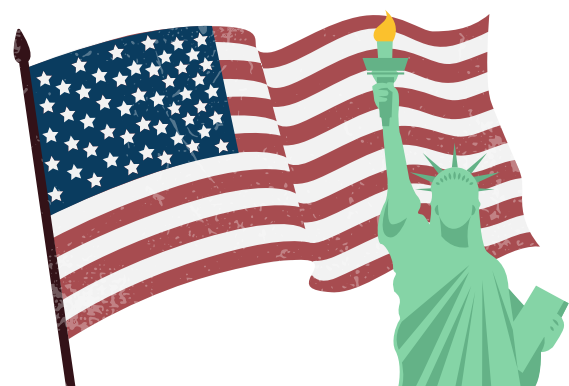
The policy has faced predictable opposition from fiscal conservatives, particularly over its proposed \$6 billion annual cost. Mamdani plans to fund universal childcare through a higher state corporate tax rate and a 2% city income-tax surcharge on New Yorkers earning more than \$1 million, prompting concerns that higher taxes could drive wealthy residents and businesses away from the city. But the disagreement extends beyond the right. Even moderate Democrats, like Hochul herself, have favoured subsidised childcare for only low-income families rather than Mamdani's model of universal provision, recognising how the model could impact the private childcare sector. To tackle this concern, the plan incorporates home-based family child care and independent centers into the city's publicly funded roster, as well as providing vouchers for families to use on a private carer. Early reports of Mamdani's policy are quite positive, with many parents, particularly mothers, being able to re-enter the workforce or increase their hours.

Beyond New York

The idea of universal childcare is stretching past Mamdani and gaining ground among the Democratic left. Abdul El-Sayed, the Democratic nominee for Michigan's 2026 Senate race, similarly advocates for federally supported universal childcare. This is one of several socialist policies that has drawn comparisons between the two politicians. El-Sayed's win as the Democratic primary, campaigning on the basis of universal healthcare and food protection, signified a leftward shift taking place outside of New York City as well.

But the overlap goes beyond Mamdani and El-Sayed. Democrats like the Seattle mayor Katie Wilson and Janeese Lewis George, who is set to rise as Washington DC's next mayor later this year, are also making affordability central to their campaigns. This resurgence builds on years of left-wing advocacy from figures such as Bernie Sanders, the independent senator from Vermont, Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, the Democratic representative for New York's 14th congressional district, and Elizabeth Warren, the Democratic senator from Massachusetts. They have pushed the party towards stronger action on housing, childcare and the cost of living.

With living costs continuing to cripple Americans and the frightening rise of extremist right-wing rhetoric, it is no surprise that Americans are beginning to favour policies that promise direct relief. Mamdani's agenda speaks to everyday stressors with immediate tangible impact. However, as socialist responses gain traction, so does political polarisation, making their expansion increasingly difficult to translate on a wider scale. The successes and controversies of Mamdani's mayoralty is one measure of how far these ideas can go, but his rise poses a bigger question: is America ready for more of him?



Cockroaches v. The State of India: How India's Gen Z is rewriting

On 15 May 2025, the Supreme Court of India was hearing a routine litigation about unemployment, one of thousands filed every year against the backdrop of increasing job insecurity.

But for India's youth, the frustration had already been building.

Earlier that year, the controversy surrounding NEET - India's competitive national medical entrance examination - had pushed that frustration to the breaking point. Question-paper leaks, irregularities and manipulation had shaken students' faith in an examination that can determine the trajectory of their lives. For the millions who spend years preparing for a single chance at medical college, a message was being becoming clear that devastating hard work was no longer enough if the system itself could not be trusted.

NEET represented a generation competing for too few opportunities, entering an increasingly precarious job market and watching institutions they were expected to trust repeatedly fail them. What began as anger over an examination quickly expanded into something much larger.

"There are youngsters like cockroaches, who don't get any employment and don't have any place in the profession." - CJI, Surya Kant.

Chief Justice of India, Surya Kant, a man sitting on the highest constitutional bench of the country, dismissed the plea of billions of lives. Reducing India's youth to nothing but mere pests, "cockroaches", mere parasites who attack the system, drain resources, and contribute to nothing.

Within hours, the clip goes viral, and within 24 hours, a 30-year-old PR Graduate from Boston University, Abhijit Dipke, releases a statement on X: "What if all cockroaches come together?" turning Kant's insult into a political identity.

Thus, launches the "Cockroach Janata Party", the new Voice of India's burnt-out youth. What began as satire quickly became something considerably more serious. Its eligibility criteria - "Unemployed, Lazy, Chronically Online, Ability to rant professionally" - were deliberately absurd. But behind the humour was a very real movement: young Indians confronting unemployment, corruption, and a political system in which they felt increasingly invisible.

Then came the '36 Day Protest' and what began as peaceful demonstrations was met with immense state retaliation. Authorities deployed tear gas canisters into the crowds at Jantar Mantar and set up checkpoints where mandatory ID checks were enforced. Mass detentions followed, and even opposition leaders expressing solidarity were taken away.

Yet, instead of crushing the movement, the state's crackdown only ignited a global wave of solidarity. Overseas Indian students and youth groups mobilised outside Indian High Commissions and government buildings worldwide; from London to Australia, protestors gathered to demand the resignation of the Indian Education Minister.

Despite police brutality, tear gas, and intimidation, Gen Z refused to break their spirit. They transformed terror into satire, wearing cockroach suits, carrying meme signboards,

the playbook on protests

Vaanya Kalra, 2nd year PPL, Delhi

and broadcasting real-time Instagram Reels directly through clouds of tear gas. Decentralised volunteer groups worked around the clock, delivering food, water, and legal support to those targeted by authorities. What the Cockroach movement ultimately proved is that India's youth are not politically dynamic by accident, but that they are organised, hyper-aware and tired of a system that has failed them. They were never apathetic; they were simply waiting for a platform they owned. By bridging deep ideological divides and standing ground against structural violence, Gen Z didn't just win a moment - they permanently rewrote the blueprint for how youth resistance will run across the globe.

And then, in a rare moment for modern Indian politics, someone surrendered. Union Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan stepped down, submitting his resignation. After weeks of dismissing the uproar and trying to contain the damage, the sheer magnitude of relentless street protests forced the state's hand. A high-ranking cabinet minister was brought down not by backroom political deal-making or parliamentary debates, but by the undeniable, collective roar of millions of young people standing their ground.

For the Modi administration, this is a clear signal. For years, his government operated under total political dominance, confident in its ability to outmanoeuvre opposition parties. But the Cockroach protests shattered that illusion. They sent a warning directly to the top: winning elections does not make a regime infallible. The voters of tomorrow are watching, and they are ready to strike back the moment their rights are trampled upon.

Now does a single resignation mean the system will suddenly change? My answer is: it won't.

Systems like India's are - and always have been - controlled by people who are far too removed from reality, far too insensitive to the struggles of everyday citizens, and far too preoccupied with preserving their own power. A single minister stepping down is a concession, not a structural overhaul. The bureaucracy remains, the institutional rot runs deep, and the political elite will inevitably try to reassert control once the dust settles.

What this movement did achieve, however, is far more vital than policy reform: it reawakened a generation. Gen Z was never politically unaware - they have always known the truth about their country, and they always will. Social media became a catalyst to bypass traditional media, share raw truths, and spread radical empathy across borders.

As someone who has seen this nation continuously divided and torn apart by identity politics, seeing young Indians of every single religion, caste, and background put their differences aside to stand shoulder to shoulder was nothing short of extraordinary. It brought a sense of pride and a rare ray of hope to a tired youth who had seen far too much apathy for far too long.

The system may not change overnight, but the dynamic has shifted forever. The match has been lit, and the fire must keep burning.



ChinaMAXXING - the transformation of MADE IN CHINA.

Adam Sharpe, 3rd Year Global Politics w/Integrated year, London

When we consider understanding trade, quantitative abstractions of data usually come to mind. It captures the cost analysis of labour costs, materials, supply chains, logistics, and capacity; calculating the most efficient model for global production. Whilst all these foundations are determinants of where the global economy makes things, it doesn't fully capture a new awakening reality of 21st-century competition:

sovereignty.

The 21st century has seen unprecedented technological growth, placing powerful resources and products in the hands of civilians across the globe. First, the internet, the global infrastructure of frictionless interactions. Then the smart phone, the integration of the internet as a vital part of day-to-day life and now the dawn of AI.

This wave of modernity, whilst unmistakably improving quality of life also opens space for dependency and risk as consumer technology has shifted from peripheral to integral infrastructure. This global infrastructure, embedded within consumer goods, has largely been dominated by the U.S. and Silicon Valley, conceptualising and setting the benchmark for how tech is used in day-to-day life. However, after establishing industrial dominance, China's newly minted 15th 5-year plan directs them to build another trade asset that could challenge this. Something a little more qualitative: national brand growth.

Upon joining the WTO in December 2001, China's integration into global supply chains has been largely understood through cost and scale. Its large workforce, rapid urbanisation and designation of Special Economic Zones (SEZs) captured world manufacturing, seeing a rapid influx of investment into Chinese industry, making the superpower the single biggest exporter in the world. Despite this indispensability, value attached to such goods from a system of design, branding, marketing and cultural prestige largely remained elsewhere.

The iPhone is perhaps the most defining symbol of this arrangement, 'Designed in California, Assembled in China', highlighted the imbalance of equity in technology supply chains. Per unit, the iPhone 7 saw value added in China standing at a mere 1% compared to the holders of the Intellectual Property for design, branding, technology and other immaterial assets (Apple) at 42%. China found itself with a dilemma. Despite having the industrial capacity to produce goods at the same rate as its facilitation of Western production, it lacked the ecosystem, design and brand confidence to develop.

MADE IN CHINA was associated with low quality, little international prestige, and, by virtue of its domestic centralisation of power, a lack of trust in native technology that permeates into day-to-day life.

As seen in the case of Huawei, a plethora of Western restrictions from 2019 to the present on the grounds of mistrust and concerns around security and dependency prevented positive interactions with Chinese brands from taking place.

25 years on from China's ascension to the WTO, this needle of consumer behaviour and perception has shifted, and the playing field is evening out. Celebrated by the internet term ChinaMAXXING, an embrace of Chinese innovation, design and technological conceptualisation, China today is often encountered by foreign audiences as a hub for innovation, technology and scale.

The significance is not in the meme itself, but in what it represents: a changing relationship between Chinese products and foreign perceptions as China opens and occupies spaces for normative shifts through discussions. From technology expositions that showcase Chinese entrepreneur's visions of the future, to tourists encountering completely cashless regions, highspeed rail and culture, to Western Influencers such as IShowSpeed showcasing the cyberpunk metropolises of the country, discussions around China are no longer shaped by high diplomacy but rather public diplomacy and pluralist everyday interactions. This sees Chinese brands disassociating from the Chinese state, allowing for new ethos of design, branding, and consumer appeal to emerge.

These shifts and challenges are reflected in the markets too. The launch of DeepSeek's R1 model in January 2025 shocked Wall Street, devaluing the Nasdaq with a 3.1% sell-off of major tech stocks and wiping 17% of Nvidia's market value as analysts reassessed the dominance of US tech demand. What was referenced widely was China's Sputnik moment, a nod to the USSR's successful orbit of the first artificial satellite around Earth, the DeepSeek Moment once again showed growing trust, respect and branded value in Chinese native products.

However, despite DeepSeek's success for China's technological prowess, the deviation from this analogy resides in the nature of the product. Sputnik was technological competition and infrastructure. Its impressiveness was technological alone. DeepSeek, as a commercial product, can be praised for both its technical performance but also recognised as a public shift in consumer confidence in Chinese brands, evident after reaching the top of Apple's US App Store downloads at the time.

Whilst mechanically DeepSeek presented a more cost-efficient frontier model compared to its American counterparts, the underlying advancement is the opportunity for Chinese tech to be evaluated on an equal comparison without perceived considerations of sovereignty and Huawei-Esque scepticisms.

Conclusively, MADE IN CHINA is becoming increasingly less defined by the parameters of high-level diplomatic security concerns, nor by its place in global value chains. It is instead being defined by the product itself, allowing consumer preference to become increasingly powerful and the greater determinant of a native Chinese brand's value. China's entry into the WTO in 2001 saw China open to international trade, making China an industrial power manufacturing the world's goods. China's forthcoming 15th Five-Year-Plan aims presents a new economic direction- making China a commercial power, developing pride and value in the brand MADE IN CHINA.

Sudan's War Is Changing. But Is Peace Any Closer?

Adrian Khodavardar, Master, International Relations, Birmingham

For more than three years, Sudan has been trapped in a devastating civil war between the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF), led by General Abdel Fattah al Burhan, and the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF). What began as a struggle for control of the state has developed into a conflict that has devastated cities, displaced millions and created one of the world's largest humanitarian crises.

The scale of the crisis is difficult to comprehend. The World Health Organization estimates that 34 million people in Sudan need humanitarian assistance, while 21 million lack adequate access to health services. The United Nations has also warned that millions are facing severe hunger as the conflict continues to restrict access to food and humanitarian aid. World Health Organization.

Yet the military balance may finally be beginning to change. During 2026, the SAF has increased pressure on RSF positions across several fronts. North Kordofan has become particularly important because of its geographical position between areas controlled by the army and RSF strongholds further west. Recent analysis suggests that the SAF regained the operational initiative during July, advancing along several important routes and recovering territory previously held by the RSF. ORSAM analysis of the Sudan conflict.

These developments matter because control of territory in Sudan is closely connected to logistics. The conflict is not simply about capturing cities. Both sides need access to roads, supply routes, weapons and manpower. If the SAF can continue placing pressure on RSF supply networks, the paramilitary group could face increasing difficulties maintaining its positions across such a large country.

There are also signs that the RSF is facing internal pressure.

A number of RSF commanders and fighters have defected during the past year. One of the most significant developments came in April when senior RSF commander Al Nour Ahmed Adam, known as Al Nour Al Qubba, left the organisation and joined forces with Burhan. Further defections have followed across Darfur and Kordofan. In August, the Sudanese military said that more than 300 RSF fighters had surrendered in Northern State and that the first stage of integrating RSF defectors into the army had been completed. Sudan Tribune on RSF defections Sudan Tribune on the integration of RSF defectors.

However, it would be premature to conclude that the RSF is collapsing.

The group still controls significant territory, particularly in Darfur, and retains access to weapons, financial networks and external support. A recent United Nations investigation found that foreign networks continue to provide military assistance to forces involved in the conflict. The report also highlighted the increasing use of drones, which has changed the character of the war and contributed to civilian casualties.

Reuters report on foreign support for Sudan's war. This is important because military setbacks do not automatically produce negotiations. In some conflicts, a weakening faction becomes more willing to negotiate. In others, it becomes more determined to continue fighting because the costs of defeat are considered too high.

This appears to be the dilemma facing Sudan.

Burhan has recently begun outlining a possible political future for Sudan. In August, he supported proposals for an inclusive national dialogue involving political and civil society groups. He also offered legal and security guarantees intended to encourage participation.

There is, however, a significant problem. Burhan has not presented negotiations as a replacement for military operations. The army continues to fight the RSF, while several civilian-led political groups have argued that a credible political process must begin with an immediate ceasefire.

This disagreement exposes one of the central problems facing any attempt to end the war. The SAF may believe that further military gains will place it in a stronger position at the negotiating table. Civilian groups, meanwhile, fear that negotiations conducted while one side is advancing militarily could simply legitimise a new political order dominated by the military.

The RSF also has its own incentives to continue fighting. Even if its position has weakened, accepting a settlement could mean surrendering territory, military influence and political power. The longer the conflict continues, however, the greater the humanitarian cost becomes.

Sudan, therefore, appears to be entering a new phase, but not necessarily a peaceful one.

The SAF is gaining momentum in parts of the country. The RSF is experiencing defections and military pressure. At the same time, diplomatic efforts are becoming more active. These developments create an opportunity that did not appear as clearly during earlier stages of the conflict.

But an opportunity is not the same as a solution.

The most important question is whether the changing military balance can be converted into political negotiations before both sides become even more entrenched. A decisive military victory could end the fighting between the SAF and RSF, but it would not automatically resolve Sudan's deeper political crisis. The country still needs a credible civilian political process, accountability for abuses and a way to rebuild institutions that have been severely damaged by war.

Sudan's war may therefore be shifting direction. The SAF may have gained the initiative and the RSF may be under greater internal pressure. Yet the real test will not be who captures the next town or defeats the next military unit.

It will be whether Sudan's political leaders can turn battlefield change into a genuine path towards peace. For millions of Sudanese civilians, that is the only victory that ultimately matters.



The son or the Survivor: Which way will Brazil turn?

Jordan Cartmill, 2nd year, History and Politics, Cheshire

On 4th October, almost 159 million people in Brazil will head to the polls for the first round of voting in a general election that will decide the president, vice president 54 senators, 26 governors and the entire lower house. But this contest is not just an average election. This is a rematch between incumbent Lula da Silva and the Bolsonaro dynasty, after the former retook the presidency in 2022.

Lula, 80, is seeking an unprecedented fourth term. His path to power has never been straight forward. Following a conviction in 2017 for bribery, money laundering and corruption during Operation Car Wash, he spent over a year in prison and was banned from the 2018 race that Jair Bolsonaro went on to win. His convictions were later overturned by the Supreme Court in 2021 due to issues with regard to what jurisdiction he was initially tried for. This cleared the way for his political return and cleared the way for his return in 2022, in which he beat Jair Bolsonaro by less than 2 points.

His opponent on this occasion is not Bolsonaro himself. The former president was convicted last September for orchestrating a coup attempt after his 2022 defeat, culminating in his supporters attacking the Congress and Supreme Court buildings, as well as the presidential palace on the 8th January 2023. He was sentenced to more than 27 years and began serving his term in late November, having already been prevented from holding public office until 2030 over claims he made questioning the reliability of Brazil's electronic voting system. In his stead, Jair endorsed his eldest son, the senator for Rio de Janeiro, Flávio Bolsonaro, to lead the Liberal Party.

Neither of the candidates have been free from scandal. The Bolsonaro campaign has been damaged by Flávio's links to the collapse of Banco Master, the country's biggest banking fraud since Operation Car Wash, after leaked messages showed him asking the bank's director to fund a biopic of his father. This has severely dented the reputation of anti-corruption he was attempting to build. Meanwhile, Lula's Workers' Party still carries the legacy of the car wash scandal. A poll earlier this summer suggests that half of all voters would vote for neither candidate.

Current polling tells us the result could go either way, with the two candidates practically tied nationally when accounting for run-off voting, with Lula projected to take 43% of the vote compared to Flávio's 40%. At the state level, the predictions are far more contested, with Flávio leading in São Paulo, Mato Grosso and Espírito Santo, while Lula takes precedence in the northeast.

Depending on the result, this election could be either a break or a continuation in the recent trend of South American elections holding victory for right-wing parties. Following key Bolsonaro ally, Javier Milei's, strong mid-terms in Argentina to the victories of Jose Antonio Kast in Chile and the end of MAS rule in Bolivia, the direction of the continent's largest country and economy will have downstream effects for the entire region, as to whether this rightward trend is cemented.

This election may end up being shaped by South America's northern neighbours in Washington. American tariffs against Brazil were placed in part due to Donald Trump's links to the Bolsonaros and his opposition to Jair's conviction. This has allowed Lula to frame the election as a fight over Brazilian sovereignty, with the candidate swearing to defend Brazil's mineral rights, stating, "In Brazil, we do not accept anyone sticking their nose where it does not belong." On the other side of the isle, Flávio Bolonsaro has used his connections to the Trump administration, to successfully request that the White House designate Brazil's largest criminal gangs as a terrorist organisation. This may have led to some voters viewing him as uncomfortably close to a foreign nation, particularly one as controversial as the United States under Donald Trump.

No matter the result, the stakes of the election go beyond the direction and management of the country. A victory for the Bolsonaros can be expected to pardon those convicted in the aftermath of the 2023 attempted coup, with a clash between the executive and the Judiciary sure to follow. Meanwhile, an unprecedented fourth term for Lula would be impressive, but would do little to quell the population's concerns over corruption that has plagued its political class.

While this race may decide whether Brazil follows the rest of the Americas to the right or carves its own path, the underlying question is whether the winner can restore the credibility and faith in the Nation's leader.



Elections in Israel: A crossroads for Israel and beyond

James Hood, 2nd year, Politics and International Relations, Stockport

In Israel, political moderacy is a rarity — the major candidates and real-world consequences of October 27th's Knesset elections epitomise this dynamic. Over three years after tragic October 7th attack by Hamas and the onset of the devastating war in Gaza, the residual aftermath of that day still lingers, shaping Israeli politics.

Standing for re-election Benjamin Netanyahu and his right-wing coalition, composed of far-right agitators such as Itmar Ben-Gvir, face what is essentially a vote of confidence from an electorate increasingly alienated with Netanyahu's hardline pursuit of war to crush what he perceives as an existential threat to the state of Israel.

Alienated some may be, but polling in September 2026 nonetheless showed that Netanyahu's coalition remains with a realistic shot at sustaining a slim majority, albeit a reduced one, of the Knesset. One poll showed both Netanyahu's bloc and the major opposition bloc each gaining 53 seats out of the 120 up for grabs. Suggesting Israelis are by no means unanimously inclined to relinquish their mandate towards Netanyahu's full throttled pursuit of war in the region.

But who comprises this opposition bloc that is edging Israel ever closer to the crossroads of a post-Netanyahu age?

Co-leading the polls and leading the opposition to Netanyahu stands a political newcomer, but long-standing establishment figure, in IDF chief of staff Gadi Eisenkot. A figure himself denying the viability of any Palestinian state in the short term.

Having himself lost his son in the Gaza conflict, Eisenkot and his recently established party Yashar have capitalised on Netanyahu's various corruption scandals and public apathy to the ongoing conflicts to posit a restored vision of a democratic Israel not plagued by democratic backsliding and national tragedies as seen on October 7th, which is increasingly being seen as preventable following reports Netanyahu was informed of Hamas' plans days prior.

The opposition bloc still retains the old guard of opposition to Netanyahu, with former Prime Ministers Naftali Bennett and Yair Lapid's Together coalition feasibly being a part of any government formed by Eisenkot.

Despite these familiar figures of the past, October's election uniquely stands as a historically significant crossroads in dictating the orientation of Israeli policy both at home, in Gaza and in the sphere of foreign policy that is so important to Israeli regional prestige.

The strings attached to the incumbent right-wing Netanyahu coalition government have increasingly become not just internally divisive due to his attempted judicial reforms in 2023, ongoing corruption trials and perennial conflicts, but also increasingly corrosive to the long-term viability of Western co-operation with Israel. A decline that could be reversed, or instead escalated, if the opposition bloc prevails in October with promises of substantive change in their approach to Palestinians.

Epitomising this escalating paradigm of international scepticism to Israeli policy direction is the announcement in September 2026 that the UK and multiple other Western powers would sanction trade with Israeli settlements in the West Bank. Settlements recently significantly escalated with the Netanyahu government's approval of settlements in the El region in Jerusalem, a region widely regarded as the cornerstone of a future Palestinian state. Whilst the Trump administration's support for Israel, in both the domestic and foreign sphere is sustained on the surface level, even this relationship may be shaped by the election in October.

In response to Ed Miliband's announcement of the sanctions, Trump explicitly stated he did not actively oppose such sanctions on settlements but actually understood their logic. Such a divergence from the Israeli pursuit of settlements from the US and their partial alignment with the UK's judgement of Israel committing ethnic cleansing in the West Bank, is a remarkable signpost to the path that Netanyahu's government is driving once steadfast allies towards a path of alienation and towards the mounting extremism being implemented by Israel towards Palestinians.

This largely comes down to the extremist vices becoming ever more prevalent in Netanyahu's policy by the day in both domestic policy and more importantly, foreign policy. Major far-right figures propping up Netanyahu, such as Ben-Gvir, are vital if he wishes to sustain a majority in the election. Yet, figures like Ben-Gvir and Smotrich, who command loyal ultra-orthodox nationalist bases, prove to be both problematic for the perceived intentions of a prolonged Netanyahu government and the feasibility of Netanyahu returning to power.

Israel's electoral system is a multi-party system, which usually relies on coalitions between ideologically aligned parties after the election to form a government. Defying stiff resistance from Netanyahu, both Ben-Gvir and Smotrich have denied his attempts to merge their respective parties. A resistance makes it easier for any ideological split between the figures to block Netanyahu's possible route to government.

And this split may theoretically come into fruition. Ben-Gvir, himself to the right of an already conservative Netanyahu, recently proposed that any coalition he forms after the election enacts "disengagement 710" which would promote Gaza strip residents "voluntary emigrate" from Gaza to neighbouring countries.

Aligning with his outright denial of a Palestinian state, this plan was apparently "frozen" by the Trump administration, yet another sign of increasing alienation from steadfast allies. But the re-election of Netanyahu would mould an understandably perceived mandate from Israelis for this course of action.

Hence, October's election is a generational crossroads between the consolidation of extremist vices into mainstream Israeli policy direction and the return to nationalist, yet internationally approved strategic directions under Eisenkot.

The choice the Israeli public makes will surely reverberate in Palestinian homes and diplomatic circles around the world.



The Far-right return in Germany: The message that the AfD's win sends in Germany and beyond

Rhys Noctor, 2nd year PAIS, Chippenham

German politics has been rocked recently by a return of far-right leadership into one of its 16 state legislatures, as the AfD (Alternative für Deutschland) party won 43.8% of the vote in Saxony-Anhalt, a state in the East of Germany during its election on 6 September. Despite not winning a majority and being unable to form a government as of yet, the party is said to be exploring its options to form one, one of which could be through an agreement with the BSW (Bündnis Sahra Wagenknecht) party. The BSW have various overlapping policy interests with the AfD and have spoken out against the mainstream German parties' "firewall policy", an agreement amongst mainstream parties to avoid any coalition with the AfD, an idea that BSW founder Sahra Wagenknecht described as "idiocy". This sets forth an incoming future where the far-right make their return to power in the German state legislature since World War 2. The AfD, were previously designated a 'racist and anti-muslim' extremist party the BfV in 2025, although this was suspended pending a court challenge.

Reactions to the victory have been as expected, current German Chancellor and leader of the CDU, Friedrich Merz has called his party's defeat "seismic", as he faces more pressure than ever to deliver on his party's promises and improve his approval ratings. Across the pond, President Trump wrote on Truth social that Germans had gotten tired of the "absolutely horrible immigration rules and regulations which have hurt Germany so badly" before capping his statement off a play on his Make America Great Again acronym "MGGA". Other prominent right-wing figures across Europe have also weighed in with leader of the far-right Spanish party Vox, Santiago Abascal, posting on X that the AfD's win was "A great hope for Germany and for Europe".

All these remarks point to the highly prevalent and unignorable trend that has been viewed across Europe and in much of the modern world. That far-right radical parties are making a monumental comeback, the likes of which haven't been seen since the 20th century. This victory in Saxony-Anhalt is one win in a long line of resurgent gains that the far-right has made in gaining back electoral power across Europe and the West. Meloni in Italy, Le Pen in France and Farage in the UK are but a handful of populist figures who have been part of the wave of the far-right resurgence in Europe and are either already in executive power or making immense gains to achieve it. Reasons for the surge in support are varied, but what is apparent is that mainstream parties are failing to effectively address voters' grievances and are feeling the burn of it, whilst the AfD and others are effectively capitalising on it and offering a solution, however unrealistic.

The AfD's win in Saxony-Anhalt is particularly prominent though, both for the messages it sends in Germany, and for the message it sends across its border. The AfD, led by Tino Chrupalla and Alice Weidel, have made their ideological stance blatantly clear. Anti-immigration. Anti-LGBTQ+. Anti-Islam. Pro-Germany. A landmark victory like this only broadens the AfD's ability to champion this dangerous ideology. No politician will be less optimistic to hear this than Chancellor Friedrich Merz. In a time where his premiership has seen record low favourability ratings of 16%, beating out the scores of his predecessor, Olaf Scholz. Merz will be reeling from this loss, as his own party, the CDU managed to win less than half the vote percentage that the AfD managed. At a time when confidence in him is already so low, this serves as another devastating blow to his likelihood of remaining on as Chancellor until the next federal election in 2029. More alarming though, is that with Merz and the CDU doing so poorly in the polls, it is increasingly likely that the AfD, already the biggest opposition party nationally, will rise to power.

What is more interesting to me though, is the message that this election has beyond Germany's borders. In the years following WW2, Germany became a bastion of liberal democracy, pacifism and pursuing a distinct effort to leave the ideology and practices of Nazi Germany behind permanently. What the AfD's victory shows is that even a country so scarred by the scourge of radical far-right politics is susceptible to its comeback given enough time. I worry for the message that this sends out to far-right groups worldwide. That no country is immune to far-right politics. That no single government, no matter how democratic, is invulnerable to the claw of the far-right. And most importantly, that people's memories are short, and that our ability to learn from history has been infamously poor.

It would be an overstatement to say that far-right are on a surefire path to total Western political domination. There is still vehement opposition to the far-right across Europe, and this election will only spur it on. What is alarmingly present though is that far-right politics, for the moment, is here to make its presence known. The politics of anti-immigration, ethno-nationalism and anti-progressiveness are increasingly pervasive, and should we choose to remain blind to history, they will remain prevalent for the long-term.



'THE POPULARITY OF POPULIST PARTIES IN THE UK IS SHORT LIVED AND WON'T LAST'

DEBATE

For

In May 2026, Leader of the Green Party Zack Polanski declared the two-party system “dead and buried,” following the Greens’ major successes in the recent local elections. Other ‘smaller’ parties, most notably Reform UK, also saw major gains, rapidly surpassing those made by the more established Parliamentary parties. The two-party system is a concept brought up often to describe the dominance the Labour and Conservative parties have historically held over British elections. In the face of populism — the idea of rallying ‘the people’ against a corrupt elite — many smaller parties have been able to achieve increasing success against the legacy parties.

The two-party system, fuelled by the electoral method of first-past-the-post, where the most popular candidate wins, continues to be extremely punishing to those outside the two main political camps, and so the success of outsiders is often considered quite the milestone. These smaller parties have seemingly been able to break into the system, achieving levels of success previously unseen, with both leaders being branded as ‘populists’ during their campaigns. However, the most recent YouGov polling puts Polanski’s party at only 12%, down from the 20% achieved in March earlier this year. Similarly, Farage’s Reform now sits equally with the Conservatives and Labour at 20%, compared to the almost 28-point polling lead it once held, with some pollsters now putting Labour ahead.

This raises a wider question for these smaller, populist parties: despite their initial achievements, it seems that populism as an approach has not been able to sustain consistent electoral success. The parties have achieved record levels of polling, party membership, councillors and mayors, yet they have failed in several recent high-stakes elections. We can point to these failures, as well as other issues like party or leadership scandals, to illustrate how populism often spikes but has yet to keep hold, its influence coming in strong yet short waves that do not produce consistent success.

The recent June Makerfield by-election, which resulted in Andy Burnham’s return to the Commons and swift rise to the Labour leadership, was a shocking loss for the Reform party. Initial polls predicted a close election between Burnham and Reform’s Robert Kenyon, placing Labour only 5–6% ahead of Reform in a tight race for the seat. However, Labour emerged victorious with a much larger majority than predicted, achieving close to ten thousand more votes than Reform and leading by a 20-point gap. The turnout for Makerfield, reaching close to 59%, cemented Reform’s significant underperformance, marking a major blow to its initial wave of success.

The particularly high turnout in this election speaks volumes about how Reform’s momentum has ultimately begun to stall, also demonstrating that polling is not, ultimately, a reflection of true political success.

This failure to translate polling into political success only became more prevalent in the Greater Manchester mayoral election, with Green candidate Geraldine Coggins failing to reach the run-off despite polling suggesting she was a likely second place. Coggins initially polled at 22%, with Reform behind at 19%. Yet the Greens would find themselves coming in third, with Labour’s Bev Craig winning with a comfortable 66%. This further demonstrates how populist parties across the political spectrum have failed to achieve the results suggested by pollsters, as their initial popularity does not produce actual results. Polanski’s recent decision to stand in former PM Keir Starmer’s seat will prove to be another major test for British populism, and whether it can truly translate popularity into tangible success. Despite winning the Gorton and Denton by-election earlier this year, Burnham’s return, Labour’s subsequent rise in the polls, and the Greens’ own decline all raise questions about whether they can sustain another success.

That inconsistency may, in fact, be the reason populist success has so far failed to hold. Reform’s Makerfield defeat and the Greens’ near-miss in Greater Manchester, alongside Gorton and Denton’s Green win and Reform’s continued seat gains at council level, demonstrate a pattern of unpredictability rather than outright failure or collapse, with both Reform and the Greens having made historic breakthroughs in one contest, yet underperformed in the next, often within months of each other.

This has been particularly true for Reform, whose own struggles this summer over party finances and its leader have put its future in a precarious position. In July, Farage resigned his Clacton seat after reports that a convicted fraudster, George Cottrell, had been funding staff on his social media operation and letting him use a townhouse near Buckingham Palace. He won the resulting by-election comfortably, but only after all the other major parties chose to boycott it, with turnout collapsing to under 45%; it settled nothing about whether voters still backed him, since there was no competition in the first place. Then in September, an undercover Channel 4 investigation appeared to catch senior Reform figures discussing how to route foreign donations into the party, prompting two resignations and formal complaints to the police from both Labour and the Liberal Democrats. Farage denies wrongdoing, but the timing is hard to ignore: each scandal has landed in the same months Reform’s polling and by-election results have wobbled, reinforcing the sense that populist momentum here is being undercut as much by self-inflicted damage as by any voter reassessment.

Polanski’s own fortunes in the upcoming by-election for Holborn and St Pancras will further prove how populism, and building a party around one individual, can be both a great advantage and a great liability. A Polanski win would likely demonstrate that populism continues to corrode an already weak two-party system, but a loss would be another example of a populist party failing to produce results despite strong pre-election polling.

Regardless, both populist parties have yet to prove they can achieve consistent, long-term and widespread success, with both remaining shaky at best.

**Will Gibson, 3rd year, Politics and Sociology,
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Against

Populism refers to ‘a political program or movement that champions, or claims to champion, the common person, usually by favourable contrast with a real or perceived elite or establishment’. In political science, a populist leader would aim to unify the “will of the people” in order to “drain the swamp” by tackling the “liberal elite”. In theory, this combines left and right ideas to become a thin-centred ideology that doesn’t attach itself to either side of the spectrum; arguably, though, the most widespread forms of populism are far-right ideologies that are hostile towards left and liberal ideas. This article will argue that the prominence of populist parties in the UK will continue to rise in the age of short-form media.

First, it is important to establish that populism is not a new trait in UK leaders. As early as the 1930, Oswald Mosley led the British Union of Fascists, combining anti-establishment populism to advance his authoritarian and fascist ideas. In the 1970s, Tony Benn became one of the most influential leftist thinkers who promoted his socialist and communist ideas by advocating an overthrow of the system run by the elites, using populism to establish himself in the mainstream media.

Even one of the most prominent populist figures in the UK, Nigel Farage, has been in the political scene for decades. He was a founding member of the UK Independence Party (UKIP), becoming a UKIP MEP for the European Parliament in 1999, and becoming the party’s leader in 2006. Since then, UKIP has evolved into the Brexit Party, which was successful in its aim in the UK leaving the EU. This was one factor influencing Farage to rebrand his party again into Reform UK, which was founded in 2018 and focuses on Christian nationalism. Alongside Reform UK, Rupert Lowe’s Restore Britain, Zak Polanski’s Green Party, and Jeremy Corbyn’s Your Party are other “populist” parties that have risen to the mainstream media scene in recent years.

Populism thrives off mobilising “the people”. For this to be done, the general public needs to be engaged in political ideas. Since politics is complex and nuanced, populist leaders often resort to plain and simple language that stick with the public. Historical populist figures needed catchy newspaper headlines and memorable TV appearances, modern populist figures most prominently need social media clicks to gain popularity.

Austrian social scientist Christian Fuchs theorised about social media attention being an economic and political commodity that producers have to compete for. Social media gives “the people” access to information in a way that hasn’t been seen historically with traditional media, as this is often run by the elites.

Where populist leaders can directly connect with “the people against the elite establishment”, they can more easily create less filtered content for quick clicks.

With social media users being both producers and consumers, they are more likely to repost and respond to simple political messaging, where one populist message can be produced thousands or millions of times. Farage’s “Isn’t it about time we

started looking after our own people?” video gained over 5 million views a few months after posting it in January 2025. Political actors can also use digital advertising and targeting to mobilise certain groups of voters, such as anti-immigration messaging to people who live in a place with high immigration levels.

On the left, leaders are also increasingly using populism to mobilise the people. Since becoming leader of the Green Party in 2025, Zak Polanski has set out to learn the ‘storytelling power’ of right-wing populism, as he acknowledged that people are ‘feeling more and more angry’. Zarah Sultana, a founder of the Labour breakaway party ‘Your Party’, maintains a populist approach when advocating for her anti-establishment policies. She has recently become known for purposely breaching Parliament rules, such as reading off a larger piece of paper during a debate; Ed Miliband described this as being ‘Designed for Tik Tok’.

Fear sells. Populist leaders in the UK use this to generate quick clicks and become viral. Populism has existed in different forms for many centuries in the UK, but the rise of short-form media such as TikTok has incentivised these leaders to simplify political ideas even more than they historically have done so. The popularity of these parties inspires even more populist parties to emerge and break off from other parties, confident that they can become popular quickly, such as Rupert Lowe leaving Reform to form his own breakaway party, Restore.

Populist parties are here to stay. Even though the UK’s first-past-the-post voting system favours the two-party system, where Labour and the Conservatives remain centre of the spectrum and vow for slow and stable change using the existing establishment, the soft influence of populist parties outside of the Westminster bubble cannot be underestimated. We can already see this with Farage’s influence on UK politics, including his Euroscepticism being represented in the European Parliament, David Cameron holding the Brexit referendum to appease the voters they were losing to UKIP, and Rishi Sunak taking a hard-line stance on immigration due to rising public pressures.

Populist parties excel at inserting their culture into public ideas, which is only being made easier by the priority of simple content for viral clips and sound bites within short-form media. That’s why UK populist parties are here to stay.

Talia Marie, 4th year, Public Policy MA, South-west London



BOOK REVIEW

The Timelessness of Orwell's Animal Farm

Charles Wawn, 3rd year, Law, London



Animal Farm is one of George Orwell's two most famous novels, alongside 1984. In fewer than 100 pages, it comprehensively and humorously critiques the failure of communist regimes to live up to the egalitarian and democratic ideals which birthed the communist revolution.

Inspired by the principles of 'Animalism' preached by a pig named Old Major, the animals of Manor Farm revolt against their neglectful, drunken farmer, Mr Jones, who is chased off the farm by the brigade of proletarian animals. In the early days, the farm, which is renamed to Animal Farm, is an insurgent society of animals gladly cooperating for the common good, under the guidance of the pigs, the wisest animals on the farm. They forsake alcohol, human clothes and sleeping in human beds, but most importantly proclaim that All Animals are equal.

But just like the Soviet Union, Animal Farm strays from its ambitious revolutionary principles. The ruling class of pigs becomes greedy, rewrites the laws of the farm and increases their own rations by taking more of the produce yielded by other animals under the guise of supporting their special health needs. A power struggle between the two leading pigs, the autocratic Napoleon compared with the open-minded Snowball, leads to the latter's exile. Snowball, the obvious stand-in for Leon Trotsky, becomes a bogeyman in his absence, blamed for all the problems on the farm, including the weather that destroys the farm's windmill.

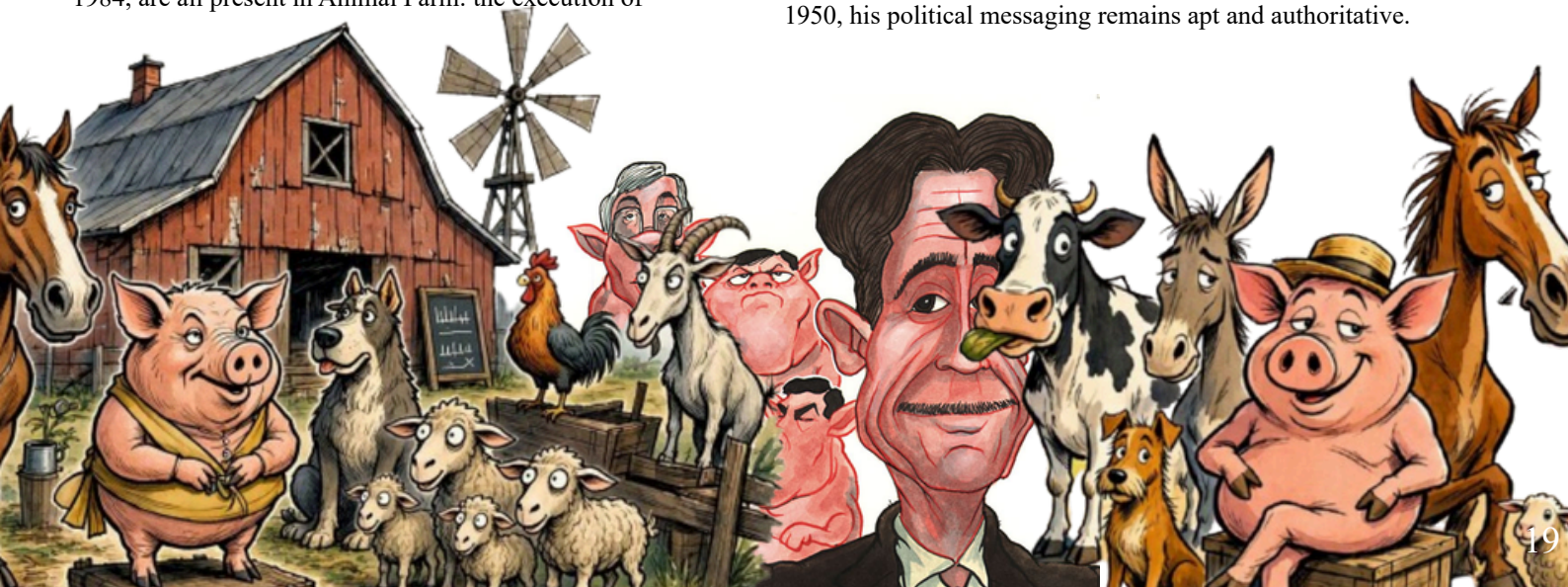
Within a few years, life at the farm for the lower animals has ceased to feel any different from the time of farmer Jones's rule, though few living animals recall the pre-revolution farm. Many defining features of Orwell's later dystopian novel, 1984, are all present in Animal Farm: the execution of

dissidents, the scapegoating of one person for all problems, the rewriting of history and the lies about the true quality of life in the community. Though the farm grows and develops into a successful trading enterprise that normalises relationships with other farmers, life for the average member of the farm remains stagnant and austere.

Since the publication of Animal Farm in 1945, Orwell's warning that absolute power corrupts and that revolutionary figures often morph into the tyrants that they overthrew, has been demonstrated time and time again. In the last 80 years, hundreds of millions of people in China, the former Soviet Union and other countries lived in regimes where dissent is censored, and dissenters are cruelly and arbitrarily punished. The parallels between the farm and the USSR, an economic and military superpower whose living conditions failed to advance at the pace of the West in the postwar years, are palpable.

For most of his life, Orwell considered himself a democratic socialist. He fought against fascists in the Spanish Civil War, which he recalled in his memoir Homage to Catalonia. He opposed authoritarianism of any kind and was appalled by Joseph Stalin's tyrannical rule.

In the modern era, the North Korean regime may be the best example of a society whose rulers have fictionalised their nation's history and deceived their people to believe that they enjoy a higher standard of living than they really do. Those who challenge the ruling party's narrative of events by consuming foreign media are denounced by the state as traitors to be reviled, having questioned the leadership's godlike practices. Nearly 80 years since Orwell's death in 1950, his political messaging remains apt and authoritative.



FILM REVIEW

THE ODYSSEY

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The Odyssey is one of the oldest stories in human history, being well over 2,000 years old. Therefore, it has had its fair share of film adaptations, from the 1954 film 'Ulysses' from the sword-and-sandal era to 'The SpongeBob SquarePants Movie', which mirrors many major plot points from Homer's second epic. With this wealth of adaptations, Christopher Nolan needed to differentiate himself from those that came before him. He created a perfect spiritual successor to his 2023 epic 'Oppenheimer', where the titular character is haunted by the implications of his own creation and hubris. For J.R. Oppenheimer, it is the creation of the atomic bomb; for Odysseus, it is the creation of the Trojan Horse. The film differentiates itself from traditional adaptations by stripping away much of Odysseus' hubris and pride, instead portraying him as a weary veteran afflicted by PTSD and haunted by his actions during the Trojan War.

The performances are a mixed bag; most of the cast deliver stellar work, with standouts including Matt Damon as the titular Odysseus, Anne Hathaway as Penelope, and Himesh Patel as Eurylochus, though the real standouts are Robert Pattinson and Samantha Morton as Antinous and Circe. Robert Pattinson yet again proves that he is a once-in-a-generation talent by delivering a perfectly sleazy villain as the head of the band of suitors who seek Penelope's hand in marriage. He easily makes the audience despise him from the start when he manipulates Telemachus into getting out of his way so he can marry Penelope. Samantha Morton plays a perfect Circe, pretending to be vulnerable before she unleashes her hatred on the soldiers in the unforgettable scene where she turns Odysseus' soldiers into pigs and even received a standing ovation from the crew once she had finished shooting, an honour only given to Heath Ledger in his Oscar-winning performance as the Joker in 'The Dark Knight'. However, the same cannot be said for Tom Holland as Telemachus, who seems to be outacted in every scene that he is in, although he does try his best to keep up with his fellow actors.

The music also deserves its flowers. Scored by Oscar-winning composer Ludwig Göransson. The music also enhances the film, especially during the siren scene, where you never actually hear them singing, just the sound of an Aulos overtaking the score as you watch Odysseus silently scream and shout. Göransson also took on a massive challenge while composing, not using a traditional orchestra but instead resurrecting period-appropriate instruments like the Aulos. This gives the film a mystical, mysterious feel that fits the portrayal of monsters like the Cyclops and the Laestrygonians. Key to the story of the Odyssey, and indeed many myths, are the monsters the hero encounters along the way, and Nolan's aversion to using CGI created a serious filmmaking challenge. However, they were not only able to achieve this by shooting on location as well as creating large puppets for the Cyclops and shooting in forced perspectives for the Laestrygonians with similar workarounds for other aspects of the film, but also to achieve it to near perfection, with the monsters looking terrifying. A personal favourite scene of mine was the Cyclops



appearing in the cave in a shot obviously inspired by Francisco Goya's 'Saturn Devouring his Son', and when the Cyclops is chasing the crew back to their ship, where the audience can see the silhouette of the monster through the trees behind them.

This effort, combined with the dedication to shoot the film entirely on 70mm IMAX lenses, requires significant innovation in filmmaking technology and creates a truly cinematic achievement.

It seems impossible to discuss the Odyssey without bringing up criticism from different people. Much of the internet outrage has come from the casting of Elliot Page as Sinon and Lupita Nyong'o as Helen and Clytemnestra. This criticism is largely baseless and comes from people who have likely not seen the film. They often say that Elliot Page was playing Achilles, who is dead by the time the Odyssey takes place and often compare these characters to their counterparts in 'Troy', released in 2004. Whilst you can compare these two films, these critics are doing this in bad faith, using racist dog whistles by comparing the white Helen in Troy and the black Helen in 'The Odyssey', not by acting, but by beauty, claiming that the white Helen is by default the more beautiful and therefore better casting. This stupid criticism drowns out serious criticism, like Tom Holland's performance or the writing of female characters like Calypso. In the original myth, Calypso complains that male gods can steal girls without consequence, but the moment a female god abducts a man, she is ordered to set him free. In the film, she is reduced to becoming Odysseus' caretaker and eventually falling in love with him. Another criticism is that it removes much of Odysseus' cunning and hubris, completely removing the iconic 'my name is nobody' scene from his interaction with Polyphemus.

To conclude, it is no wonder that when Sir Christopher Nolan gathered a group of extremely talented individuals and had them create a film, it turned out to be a cinematic achievement and, for all its flaws, a masterpiece. With so many major films coming out this year, it looks like an incredibly contentious awards season.





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