

University College London est.1826

# SOCIAL AND HISTORICAL SCIENCES EDITORIAL

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# Global Change: An Evolving Order

For the first edition of our journal, we wanted to build a forum: a place where writers from across the Social and Historical Sciences could take up whatever they felt deserved attention, in whatever field they knew best. The result is deliberately broad. With contributors and subjects this varied, we felt the edition needed something to hold it together, a single thread that gave the collection a sense of universality.

Global change is that thread. It is a topical theme, unavoidable in any honest account of the present, but it is more useful than that. It lets each author work inside the nuances of what change actually means. What causes change? What does it mean for different people, on different sides of it? Is change necessarily the same thing as progress? And will we, in time, look back on this moment as an age of revolutionary change, or as one more stretch of ordinary history? How can we make sure the most people benefit from change? Questions this large cannot be answered from a narrow vantage point. That is the case for breadth.

Start with the oldest observation of all. Everything changes. Heraclitus said as much twenty-five centuries ago, standing at a river he claimed no one could step into twice, and the long record of history has been proving him right ever since. Power moves. Empires rise and are dismantled, the centre of the world drifts from one capital to another, rights are won, lost, and fought for again. The question is never whether the world will change. It is who gets to shape that change, and in whose interest.

That question is not neutral, and neither is its answer. The same event, a tariff, a court ruling, a shift of power from West to East, arrives as progress for some and as loss for others. It almost never announces which. Language does the quiet work here. Reform, liberation, restoration, progress: each implies a verdict about which direction is forward. And power understands this better than anyone. Sometimes it resists change by pretending to embrace it. Lampedusa caught the move exactly in *The Leopard*: "everything must change so that everything can stay the same." Reform that is really preservation. Motion without movement. At other times it does the opposite, turning to face the past and offering a remembered order in place of an uncertain one.

Change unsettles us, and it unsettles even when it is welcome. To live through it is to feel the ground move underfoot, to sense that the world is speeding up while we are not. That unease is not a weakness. It is the natural response. And it tempts every generation into the same belief: that its own moment is the decisive one, the great rupture, the hinge on which everything turns. Sometimes a generation is right. More often the sense of unprecedented change is the most preceded thing about us, a new turn of a very old wheel. Whether our age proves genuinely revolutionary, can only be answered from the future, looking back.

What is certain is that change does not wait for our consent. Part of it will always be beyond anyone's command. But it is not only something done to us by those in charge. It is also something people make. Hannah Arendt called this natality: the simple fact that every new generation arrives able to begin something that did not exist before. The two truths sit together

more easily than they look. Humanity has always tried to read the wind, to work out where the great currents are heading. No sailor wastes effort fighting the wind itself. The skill, the whole of it, is in how you set the sail. We cannot decide that the world will stop changing. We can decide what to do with the change we are handed.

That is the spirit in which the writers here have taken up the theme. The pieces speak in many registers at once: urgency and unease, optimism and nostalgia, the careful language of reform and the conviction of progress. They do not agree, and they are not meant to. The purpose of an edition like this is not consensus. It is attention: a broad range of perspectives trained on a single, unpredictable force, offered to you whether that unpredictability fills you with excitement or with dread. The wind will blow either way. These pages are an attempt to engage with the whirlwinds of change and perhaps help people to decide what kind of sailors we mean to be.

We would like to thank the faculty and the writers for their help with this edition and we look forward to continuing bridging the gap between undergraduates and publication the next academic year. Most of all we would like to thank you the reader for engaging with our work.

Sincerely, your Founders,  
Amelie Wuttke, Edvard Roberts, Fran Wyse, Issy Rice

*Social and  
Historical Sciences  
Editorial Team.*

## Table of Contents

- 5 The Past is Not a Policy – *Lucie Delamarre*
- 6 Technological Warfare: How Defence is Evolving in the Global Digital Age  
– *Amelie Wuttke*
- 7 Is Donald Trump Enabling a Shift in International Power Dynamics from the US to  
China? – *Edvard Roberts/Keira Potitneni*
- 9 Mamdami-Trump, a Lesson for the Midterms - *Imad Ahmer*
- 10 M(Ag)A Dollar: Why Silver Isn't Stopping – *Ollie Catt*
- 12 Cross-Strait Tensions: How Shifting Power Dynamics are Redefining China-Taiwan  
relations - *Angus Xu*
- 14 Global Change in the Perception and Experience of Extreme Cold Weather  
– *Daisy Hoban*
- 15 British Imperialism: The Fall of Great African Kingdoms - *Emaad Muhammad*
- 17 Global Favourites, and the Longer View of the Rules-based Order in Central Sub-  
Saharan Africa – *Tom Karl*
- 18 Kashmiri self-determination: global change in international law and human rights in  
an age of post-colonialism – *Eva Crawshaw*
- 20 Buy, Don't Do: Rainbow-washing and the Commodification of LGBT+ Membership  
– *Kit Beresford*
- 22 Legalizing Choice: Progress, Pushback, and the Shadow of U.S. Reversal  
– *Miranda Vallis*
- 25 Diplomacy Without Diplomas: The Role of Youth Social Movements in Shaping  
Public Policy - *Raissa Rambocus*
- 27 Global Youth Internet Protection Across the World: How is it Affecting the Use of the  
Internet - *Joe Yiu Ip*

# The Past is Not a Policy

Written by Lucie Delamarre

Most of us don't wake up and think about 'global change'. We feel it. It pops up in the prices of groceries, it lingers in the everlasting heat of October, it creeps in with the feeling that everything is moving faster, everything except us. It feels like the world is changing too fast, and we can't catch up with it.

What we once thought were upcoming problems are now everyday experiences we have to deal with. Climate change, artificial intelligence, geopolitical turmoil; they're all a bit too real. Most of us don't know how to deal with them.

It seems we aren't alone in this confusion. Politicians don't know either. Faced with a future that feels overwhelming and insurmountable, some politicians have found a simpler way to deal with this. They look backwards. Nostalgia is at the core; it has become a safe haven for those in power. It allows them to ignore change instead of responding to it; it allows them to fall into the comfort of regress.

But what is so wrong about it? How can it be dangerous if we all feel it? It's everywhere: in those distant static cartoons, in the sweet stickiness of our hands left by our popsicles, in the smell of the fresh grass we used to run on. How can something so sweet, so comforting, and so personal be supposedly politically dangerous? The danger lies not in the emotion in itself, but in how it's used.

Not all nostalgia is the same. Some of it stays private and reflective; it dwells in the ache of distance, but it accepts it. It accepts that the past is gone. This is reflective nostalgia (Boym, 2001). There exists another, louder, kind. It refuses the distance and detachment. It clings to the past as if it were still here: restorative nostalgia. It turns memory into a project, one that many seem to share.

From "Make America Great Again" to Brexit's promise to "take back control", the message is clear: there was a time when things made sense, when there was order, stability, and a sense of belonging. However, the message also states that something went wrong.

This 'something' is never treated as accidental or necessary in the process of development. Instead, it's framed by the same politicians who use nostalgia in their politics as theft. They see the past as something pure and perfect, which was taken away from them by elites, immigrants, outsiders, or just anyone who is considered an 'other'. Once the past is framed as stolen, nostalgia starts demanding corrective action. What was lost needs to be restored. The emotion is no longer a mere feeling; it has transformed into a thought-through political project.

For this project to actually work, the past can't be used as is to mobilise. It needs to be simplified, curated. Ambiguity and complexity don't easily mobilise, but myth can. Conflict, violence, inequality, or anything that doesn't fit the prefabricated idea of what the past was is then erased. History is edited to the point where it's clean enough to return to. The past is no longer historically accurate; it is not what happened but what should happen again.

This imagined past doesn't mobilise just anyone. It also sets up boundaries. Memories are selected to fit the narrative about "who we were". Some belong to the past, and some don't. There is a clear "us" vs. "them" mentality which easily intersects with populism. There is a "legitimate" subject of restoration, and an "illegitimate" obstacle to it.

This is how global change is moralised instead of governed. Political failure is now explained by "obstructions" instead of by the limits of policy or actors. But within this shift, we lose the purpose of politics in and of itself. Politics is meant to deal with the future, decide what comes next for us. Restorative nostalgia reverts that orientation. If we treat the past as a template, it limits our possibilities of interacting and dealing with global change. The issues we face today can't be solved through return. Our seas won't just stop rising because we decide to live in a world where they didn't. Injustices won't be addressed if we simply polish or ignore them.

This doesn't mean that nostalgia has no outright place in politics. It simply means we should be

aware of how we use memory. It should be used to reflect, acknowledge, even expose, not paralyse us. Memory needs to be used to understand the

present, not control it. The problem is not in remembering the past; it is in refusing to imagine the future.

## Technological Warfare: The Evolution of Defence in the Global Digital Age

Written by Amelie Wuttke

For as long as man has walked this earth, he has been drawn into conflict with those around him. From the competition over land amongst the *Homo sapiens* and Neanderthals, to the great wars of the twentieth century, confrontation has remained central to the human experience. However, the method by which this takes place has evolved. The current age we find ourselves in is consumed by the digital sphere, and as our way of life drifts slowly online, so do critical industries, like defence. That is not to say, however, that warfare has not often utilised technology, rather, that modern mechanisms, like artificial intelligence, are altering the landscape of militarisation permanently, for better or for worse.

Mark Rutte, NATO Secretary General, argues that “Russia has brought war back to Europe.” Indeed, many fear that the present world exists in a state of global militarisation, where nations anticipate a scale of conflict that has not been endured since 1945. Leaders are increasingly abandoning their diplomatic means of soft power for applications of hard power. The recent military action of President Trump and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu in Iran, alongside President Putin’s opposition to a seat at the negotiating table, while his forces relentlessly attack Ukraine, is proof enough. Although Trump claims to end wars, in his pursuit of a noble peace prize, the position of the USS Abraham Lincoln in the Arabian Sea would suggest otherwise. Amidst the age of militarisation, two primary channels are evolving that will radically change the game of defence; software attacks on government infrastructure, and the advancement of drone technology, both of which utilise artificial intelligence.

The geopolitical front lines are no longer restricted to land-based warzones, they are entrenched all around us, as the vast majority of civilian daily operations depend on the technology made use of by threat actors. Cyber attacks ranked first

amongst G7 security risks at the Munich Security Conference in February. In the last three years cyber warfare has climbed the ranks of concern in the minds of European governments. Assaults on nation state infrastructure, from energy grids to water utilities, cause fear amongst national populations, and trigger distrust between the people and their government. On January 27 this year, a dark web Russian hacker alliance targeted Danish government infrastructure, in an attempt to put pressure on the country’s military support for Ukraine. The pro-Moscow group gave Denmark 48 hours to withdraw an aid package, however, when this deadline passed, a series of distributed denial of service (DDoS) attacks were used to overwhelm systems critical to the functionality of society. Torsten Schak Pedersen, Danish Minister for Resilience and Preparedness, worries that Europe is not sufficiently equipped to withstand such attacks.



*Ukrainian troops operating a drone near Kupiansk/ Kostiantyn Liberov*

Cyber warfare is becoming more lethal with the advent of artificial intelligence. Advanced models can now triage vast amounts of information in stolen data sets, which has transformed the mindset of intellectual property thieves: ‘harvest now, decrypt later.’ The risk to governments and defence firms rises as technological capabilities advance.

Whilst many attacks stem from the underground channels of the internet, technology is largely impacting the geopolitical arena above land, and particularly in the sky. Drone warfare is now more advanced than ever before. Russian strategy last winter was to overwhelm Ukrainian forces with their mass of unmanned vehicles. The energy grid that supplies heating systems for Kyiv was attacked and shut down amidst -30 degree weather. The Ukrainian response to this unparalleled scale of mechanisation is to develop their own drone capabilities. Vampire hexacopters controlled by radio waves often do not reach their target, as these signals can be intercepted by Russian electronic warfare. In light of this, Ukrainian drone forces have been using fibre optic FPV (First-Person View) vehicles to take out Russian ground convoys. This kind of technology cannot be intercepted electromagnetically, as the communication signals pass through a thin 40km glass cable that is attached to the drone, and extends all the way from underground forest bases on the Ukrainian front line.

Drone warfare allows conflict to reach remote parts of the globe, like rainforest villages or desert towns that were previously untouched. The range of violence is extended. This February the Allied Democratic Forces, who are backed by Islamic State, killed over 20 people in farmers' fields in the Congo. This group, as well as the M23 rebels, and the Congolese national army, all use Chinese CH-

4 drones, which are actively under development to incorporate artificial intelligence.

In West Africa drones are often deployed defensively to protect infrastructure against attacks from militia groups, namely the Sunni jihadist Islamic State West African Province (ISWAP) branch. Last May Nigeria was granted a \$1.2 million contract by NetHawk solutions to deploy AI-powered drones, and many countries throughout Africa are engaged in technology partnerships with Israel and the United States.

However, this does not encapsulate the full potential of drone activity. Eric Schmidt, former CEO of Google, founded the military services company White Stork, manufacture of the Bumblebee drone. This device can be 'unleashed' from human control, at the flip of a switch, and is able to assume full power under artificial intelligence. Once it locks in on a target it no longer requires a human pilot, and will track its victim until the strike is successful. Whilst this technology is clever, and has the capacity to aid Ukrainian soldiers on the battlefield against waves of Russian attacks, I want to make one thing very clear. This is not an advancement to be taken lightly. Human withdrawal from the defence process leaves extraordinary margin for error, and is a dangerous proposition. It is critical that we keep a close eye on the use of AI in defensive manoeuvres.

## Is Donald Trump Enabling a Shift in International Power Dynamics from the US to China?

Written by Eddie Roberts/Keira Potitneni

In the year that Donald Trump took office, his administration has been tumultuously eventful. From mass mobilising ICE to terrorise migrant communities, to presiding over the longest government shutdown in U.S. history, Trump's domestic record has been incredibly polarising, but it is his foreign policy record that has had the most sweeping global changes. President Trump's foreign policy, characterised as the Donroe Doctrine (a corollary to the Monroe Doctrine, defined by its coercive diplomacy), has upended the established international order entrenched since the end of the Cold War. Trump's flaunting of international law, weaponisation of tariffs,

rebukement of allies and a general unpredictable and equivocating foreign policy has had dramatic consequences, not only for America's global standing but for the international system. One looming question arises: is Donald Trump's foreign policy enabling a shift in global power from the West toward China?

When Donald Trump returned to the White House, few in Europe doubted that turbulence was coming. What they did not anticipate was the speed and intensity of the geopolitical shift and how sharply European publics would register that shift. The ECFR's 2025 global survey captures this

mood. Europeans have become “the world’s chief pessimists,” the report notes, with only 18% expressing optimism about their country’s future. One line from the survey is especially telling: “Most Europeans no longer consider America a reliable ally”

This pessimism is not abstract. It is rooted in a sense of abandonment. Trump’s transactional foreign policy has left Europe exposed. His administration’s public rebukes of NATO allies, tariff threats against EU industries, massive reduction in support for Ukraine, Greenland claims, and the now-infamous Munich speech by Vice-President J.D. Vance has all contributed to a perception that Washington is no longer the anchor of European security.

Nowhere is this shift more visible than in Ukraine. Once the most pro-American society in Europe, Ukrainians increasingly see Brussels, not Washington as their primary lifeline. According to the ECFR poll, 39% of Ukrainians now view the EU as an ally, compared to just 18% for the US, a dramatic fall from the previous year. This is not simply about sentiment. Trump’s wavering support for Kyiv, his flirtation with a “peace deal” on Moscow’s terms, and his refusal to guarantee long-term military aid have all contributed to a sense that Ukraine’s war has become a regional conflict, not an international cause.

Russia, meanwhile, has undergone its own perceptual pivot. As the ECFR data shows, Russians increasingly see Europe, not America, as their primary adversary. This is a remarkable reversal. Trump’s overtures to Vladimir Putin, combined with Washington’s retreat from sanctions enforcement, have softened Russian hostility toward the US. Europe, by contrast, remains the architect of the sanctions regime and the principal supporter of Ukraine’s defence.

The result is a Europe that feels strategically naked and a Russia increasingly dependent on China. Analysts at the Carnegie Russia Eurasia Center have described Moscow as drifting into “vassalage”, a junior partner in a relationship defined by Chinese capital, Chinese technology, and Chinese diplomatic cover. This dynamic is reinforced by trade data. China is now Russia’s largest trading partner by a vast margin, and Beijing’s purchases of discounted Russian oil have

become a financial lifeline. Meanwhile, Europe’s own economic leverage over Russia has evaporated.

Trump’s renewed interest in Greenland, framed once again in terms of strategic acquisition, has further unsettled European leaders. Danish officials privately describe the US posture as “neo-imperial,” and the episode has revived fears that Europe is no longer treated as a partner but as a bargaining chip. At the same time, Europe’s attempts to “de-risk” from China have faltered. Despite Commission rhetoric, Chinese electric vehicles, solar panels, and batteries continue to flood European markets. Almost all major European leaders have visited Beijing recently, with Macron recently making his fourth visit.

If Europe is anxious, the rest of the world is adapting and in many cases, adapting toward Beijing. In South Africa, Brazil, Turkey, and even India, large majorities believe their countries can maintain good relations with both the US and China. But when forced to choose, an increasing number now lean toward Beijing. In South Africa, the shift has been dramatic: from a pro-US majority in 2023 to a pro-China plurality by 2025.

This is not ideological affinity. It is pragmatism. Beijing builds roads, ports, and railways without attaching the governance conditions that Western aid typically demands. China now ranks among the top three trading partners for 157 countries. In Africa, where it outraded the United States by more than three to one in 2024, its presence is not an abstraction but a physical reality of ports, power plants, and railways. The first half of 2025 saw the highest Belt and Road engagement ever recorded, with \$123 billion in deals, driven overwhelmingly by Africa and Central Asia.

Washington, meanwhile, has been pulling in the opposite direction. The gutting of USAID eliminated 90% of American foreign aid contracts. The cuts fell hardest on Africa, where the agency had directed roughly a quarter of its budget. A Lancet study published earlier this year projected that global aid cuts could contribute to 9.4 million additional deaths by 2030. For governments in Nairobi, Brasilia, or Pretoria weighing their options between great powers, the decision is logical: one is building, the other is leaving.

And for those governments, Xi Jinping's authoritarianism has one quality that Mr Trump's America conspicuously lacks: predictability. A development minister does not need to check social media each morning to discover whether the terms of engagement have changed overnight. The ECFR data bears this out. In Brazil and South Africa, more people now view China as an ally than at any point previously recorded. In India, despite decades of border tensions, nearly half of respondents see China as either an ally or a necessary partner. The post-American world, as the ECFR report puts it, is one most people outside the West already appear to be imagining.

The Donroe Doctrine's most dangerous legacy may not be economic but normative. Mr Trump's foreign policy has been defined by coercion: tariff weaponisation against allies and rivals alike, aid cuts across two continents, unilateral sanctions, and most dramatically, intervention in Venezuela and the Iran war. Each of these actions, taken individually, might be defensible. Taken together, they amount to a systematic dismantling of the rules-based order that Washington itself constructed.

If the United States normalises coercive regime change in its own hemisphere, it weakens the very principle it would need to invoke in defence of

Taiwan. Beijing has said little publicly about Venezuela, but the strategic implications are obvious. Every American overreach reinforces China's preferred narrative: that the United States is an unpredictable power whose time as global arbiter is passing. Why confront an adversary that is dismantling its own influence?

China's restraint should not be mistaken for passivity. The recent purge of several senior PLA generals has sparked debate among analysts. Some interpret the shake-up as evidence that the military is not yet ready for a major operation. Others see it as Xi consolidating command ahead of a possible Taiwan contingency. What is clear is that Beijing is not in a hurry. The longer Mr Trump alienates allies, cuts aid, and destabilises the institutions of American leadership, the stronger China's hand becomes without it having to play a single card.

The great irony of the Donroe Doctrine is that it may achieve the opposite of what it intends. A foreign policy designed to reassert American dominance is instead accelerating its erosion, and handing China the kind of strategic opportunity that no amount of Belt and Road spending could have bought. The question is no longer whether the global order is changing rather who will fill the United States sized hole.

## Mamdami-Trump, a Lesson for the Midterms

Written by Imad Ahmer

For many Brits, myself included, there's a perception that politicians are ineffective at connecting with the general public or even members of their own constituency. Electorates are increasingly becoming disillusioned with politics. But Zohran Mamdani's social media campaign, combined with his warm yet articulate demeanour, was compelling enough for my and New Yorkers opinion to change.

On November 4th, 1,036,051 New Yorkers voted for the Democratic Socialist in the 2025 NYC mayoral election, definitively defeating Andrew Cuomo, the disgraced former governor. The result was a bold rebuttal to the status quo, signalling defiance against major corporate backed-campaigns which have tended to dominate mayoral victories. However we must ask what this election meant for relations with the White House?

During Mamdani's campaign Donald Trump held no punches in attacking the former council man, brandishing him as a communist with unrealistic policies that would drive wealthy New Yorkers out of the city and plunge the city into debt. However, in an unexpected turn of events in a White House meeting on November 21 he President was "full of praise" for the mayor-elect. Donald Trump was "confident that he [Mamdani] can do a very good job" – signalling consensus amidst a tense media showdown. Journalists were quick to highlight Mamdani's "despot" jab towards the President as a vicious attack, but Trump brushed it off, defending the mayor-elect. What was particularly interesting to see was the bond forged by their mutual love of New York.

"Deliver affordability" was Mamdani's message, and it seemed that Trump was unable to deny the

potency of that either. Perhaps the main reason why both men were able to win comfortably in their respective elections was their shared focus on cost-of-living. High inflation in 2024 had seen voters become increasingly frustrated with the Democrats, enabling Trump to swoop in with a promise of economic stability. Similarly, during the NYC election campaign, Mamdani remained adamant in his plan to tackle rent by freezing increases on stabilised apartments. “An end to forever wars” and a cut down on crime was also tabled for discussion. Furthermore Donald Trump loves a “winner”, especially long-shot political outsider candidates with populist tendencies, in many ways the two men are not too dissimilar.



*Mamdani declaring four-year rent freeze for rent-stabilized tenants on 1 October/ Emily Swanson*

Amidst all this cross-party consensus, there is a growing fear amongst conservatives in the US. Following a rift over the release of the Epstein files, Marjorie Taylor Greene has since stepped down from Congress - a fitting omen for whatever is to come in the 2026 midterms. According to The Hill, if the midterms were held tomorrow,

Democrats ‘would likely win, and win big.’ This comes after a congressional poll from PBS/NPR/Marist polling suggesting that the Democrats are ahead by 14 points (55% to 41%). If the GOP wants to avoid a repeat of 2018 (when Democrats gained a historic 41 seats in Congress), it is clear they should take a page out of Mamdani’s book. Cost of living and the economy remains the most salient issue for voters who are souring on Trump's erratic economic policy that’s seen the stock market reach new found highs while ordinary Americans continue to struggle. Instead it seems the GOP has resorted to jerryandering states to mitigate a potential blue wave. So what next?

Optimism amongst political commentators over Mamdani and Trump’s meeting should be met with caution. For New Yorkers, the issues and policies the mayor-elect pledged to deliver should be followed through with action. The initial signs are promising, with Mamdani’s recent appointment of Lina Khan, ex-FTC chair who lobbied against corporate interests. For the Republican Party, clarity is essential if they hope to put up a serious challenge at the next set of elections. Greene’s resignation, the Epstein scandal and the recent government shutdown, have crippled the GOP’s capacity to challenge the Democrats. Whatever happens, America will be heading to the polls next year, and a chapter of Trump-era populism may soon be constrained. Mamdani’s ambition claims a new dawn on local leadership, and offers a novel pathway for Democratic mobilisation. His optimism reflects a potential turn to accountable political governance, questioning the new order of corporate and elite interest. He must not disappoint.

## M(Ag)A Dollar: Why Silver Isn't Stopping

Written by Ollie Catt

If you had bought silver on the 1st of January, you would have been in for an exciting journey. Silver pushed all-time highs almost every week through February, with swings unseen since the 1970s, peaking near \$93 before Iran's February 28th entry into open conflict with the US and Israel rattled the trade. It now sits around \$79, still up roughly 142% on the year, and priced higher than at any point in the previous four decades. But why?

To explain the so-called "Dollar Debasement Trade", we need to look back. Silver has been used as a currency since around 2500 BC, predating even gold. The Coinage Act of 1792 established the basis of the US dollar, with a ratio of 15:1 gold to silver.

This convertibility continued, with various alterations, until Richard Nixon ended the dollar's

peg to gold in 1971. Recent enough for those in power to have a strong memory of.

The relevance of this relic can be seen today through silver's rocky but proven relationship with its older brother, gold. The yellow metal is being snapped up by the hungry mouths of Chinese, Russian and other BRICS central banks, pushing it to around \$4,800 in recent days after briefly smashing through \$5,600 in January. The World Gold Council notes that China's central bank has now bought gold for sixteen consecutive months, while the Czech National Bank has extended its streak to thirty-six. Over the last three years central banks have bought more than 1,000 tonnes of gold annually, roughly double the pre-2022 pace.

Silver's ratio to gold, over the last 50 years, has varied from 16:1 to 120:1 and currently sits around 60:1. The historical precedent is for this ratio to compress during periods of monetary debasement, war and inflation. The reason for the volatile moves is that silver is a much smaller market, roughly a tenth the size of gold, and therefore vulnerable to large swings in both directions.

Diversification away from the dollar is also visible in individual buying. The Bank of England has at various points been overwhelmed by demand for minted silver coins. The Silver Institute's 2025 World Silver Survey notes that in the 15 years to 2025, Americans accumulated an astonishing 1.5 billion ounces of physical silver, roughly double the annual amount mined globally. Indian investors, long known for their affection for precious metals, purchased around 840 million ounces of bars and coins between 2014 and 2024.

More tellingly, Chinese gold ETFs absorbed a record \$8.5 billion in Q1 2026 alone, the equivalent of 50 tonnes, while Western ETFs shed over \$2 billion over the same period. The global bid is no longer coming from the same places it used to. Why now?

Donald Trump has been a loud voice against the long-standing American trade deficit. Beyond tariffs, depreciating a currency is one of the easiest ways to boost your trade balance. The economics is simple: exports become cheaper, imports become more expensive in your local currency, which just so happens to be what you get paid in.

Throughout both terms, Trump has constantly berated the Federal Reserve over interest rates, and his January nomination of Kevin Warsh to replace Jerome Powell (confirmation hearing still pending) has been read by markets as the surest sign yet that easier money is on the way. Economic uncertainty flowing from the White House has made international investors increasingly wary of dollar-denominated assets. And the One Big Beautiful Bill is set to add an estimated \$2.5 trillion to the federal deficit, doing nothing to reassure creditors about the US government's capacity to service its obligations.

Then there is silver's dual use. Silver is the best electrical conductor known to man, making it irreplaceable in solar panels, semiconductors, electric vehicles and, increasingly, the power infrastructure behind AI data centres. Roughly 60% of annual silver demand now comes from industrial applications, and the market has just run a fifth consecutive year of structural deficit, with the Silver Institute estimating 762 million ounces have been drawn from above-ground stockpiles since 2021.

There is a less-discussed thread running through all of this: oil. WTI crude has jumped more than 55% since Iran entered the war on February 28th, trading above \$110 a barrel as the Strait of Hormuz (through which around 21% of global petroleum flows) remains effectively closed under blockade. The International Energy Agency has called the disruption the largest supply shock in the history of the global oil market.

That matters for precious metals for two reasons. First, oil is the most reliable input into goods-price inflation, and inflation is the single strongest historical tailwind for silver and gold. Second, the Fed's response function becomes impossible. Cut rates to support a slowing economy and you stoke inflation; hold rates to fight inflation and you deepen the recession. That dilemma, stagflation, is precisely the environment in which gold outperformed every other asset class in the 1970s, and in which silver's dual identity as precious metal and industrial input becomes uniquely attractive.

None of this is a one-way bet. A ceasefire that actually sticks would pull oil back toward \$80, ease inflation, and remove the geopolitical safe-

haven premium. JP Morgan's commodities desk expects silver to average around \$81 through 2026, which would imply prices grind sideways rather than higher from here. The Silver Institute itself forecasts industrial demand to fall around 3% this year as solar manufacturers "thrift" silver out of each panel and jewellery demand continues to slide.

A stronger dollar would hurt too. If the Fed is forced to hold rates higher for longer to contain oil-driven inflation, the opportunity cost of holding non-yielding silver rises sharply. And silver remains punishingly volatile: it fell around 15% in the first weeks of the Iran conflict. Anyone buying at these levels should be prepared to watch the price halve before it doubles.

The bearish voices are not fringe. TD Securities' Bart Melek has silver averaging just over \$44 this year. Frank Schallenberger at LBBW expects slowing solar momentum and weak jewellery demand to weigh on prices.

And yet. The structural story has not changed: central banks are diversifying out of dollars, the US fiscal trajectory is worsening, industrial demand for silver keeps finding new sources, and every month of war in the Middle East adds to the case for owning something no government can print. Bank of America has lifted its 2026 silver target to \$65; UBS sees \$60 with a possible spike higher. Wells Fargo now has a \$6,100 to \$6,300 year-end target on gold. Even the cautious consensus is bullish relative to history.

Silver is no longer cheap. But in an era of weaponised sanctions, contested Fed independence, widening deficits and oil shocks, with the global reserve system quietly reorganising itself around Beijing and Shanghai rather than New York and London, cheap is no longer the point. Store-of-value assets are being repriced for a world where the old anchors are all in question at once.

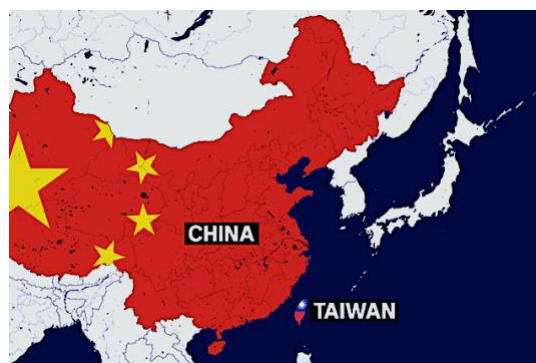
Strap in for silver's meteoric rise.

## Cross-Strait Tensions: How Shifting Power Dynamics are Redefining China-Taiwan relations

Written by Angus Xu

The complicated situation in the Taiwan Strait can be mainly attributed to the unfinished Chinese Civil War (1927-49). The Communist Party of China launched a civil war as early as 1927 with the governing Kuomintang's (KMT) Republic of China, which was founded in 1912 after Sun Yat-sen's revolution succeeded against the Qing dynasty, with minimal success. However, through the Japanese invasion the KMT suffered major casualties, with a weakened KMT, the Communist Party of China under the leadership of Mao eventually gained the upper hand in the Civil War post-World War II and defeated the KMT, with the KMT retreating to Taiwan bringing Republic of China with them, hence leading to the present situation, two different governments running on both sides of the Taiwan Strait, with the Communists' People's Republic of China (PRC) governing the Chinese mainland and the Republic of China (ROC) running Taiwan, leading to unresolved sovereignty challenges on both sides. This piece is going to address the increased asymmetry between the two powers

across the Strait and the implications of the future. To address ambiguity, the Republic of China relates to the government which still runs Taiwan to the present day, whereas the People's Republic of China relates to the government which runs the mainland.



ABC News: GFX/Jarrold Fankhauser

After Mao died in 1976, Deng took over as the premier of China and began pushing more capitalist policies, opening China's economic market to the world. This policy meant that China achieved considerable amounts of economic

growth through the 1980s and 1990s. Through joining internationally recognized World Trade Organization, China had accelerated economic growth and emerged as the second largest economy of the world. Rapid growth has enabled a dramatic expansion of fiscal resources and technological capacity, which Beijing has increasingly converted into military and diplomatic power. A core element of this is the modernization militarily, of its People's Liberation Army. China has invested heavily in anti-access/area denial (A2/AD) capabilities, long-range precision missiles, advanced air power and a blue-water navy, including aircraft carriers and a growing submarine fleet. These developments have progressively eroded the traditional military advantage enjoyed by Taiwan and its external backers.

After Xi's rise to the premier, China has taken a harsher approach on the Taiwan issue. In recent years, China has increased its military pressure to Taiwan by asserting its military dominance around Taiwanese waters, through military exercises, air defence identification zone and also diplomatic pressures against the ROC government.

Comparatively, Taiwan has gone through rapid democratization in contrast to China since the 1990s, where a transition from an authoritarian KMT rule to a competitive democracy also highlights an element of global change. Domestically, generational shifts of perception of identity also plays a vital role in the increased tension of the strait. Traditionally, a huge portion of the population would still regard themselves as Chinese, given their historical roots and some families as first-generation immigrants. However, younger generations would increasingly identify themselves as 'Taiwanese', an identity which wish to separate themselves with China and the wish to reject Beijing's influence and its 'one country' framework. The 2014 Sunflower revolution which was against a major trade agreement with China and subsequent Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) electoral successes further entrenched societal resistance for any model of 'One Country, Two Systems.' This is a structural driver of tension because Beijing increasingly perceives Taiwan's political trajectory as "creeping independence," even when

Taipei describes its stance as maintaining the status quo.

Another major driver of this conflict will be the Cross-Strait dynamics is the escalation of U.S.–China strategic competition, which reflects broader transformations in the global order. As China's rise challenges long-standing U.S. predominance in the Indo-Pacific, Taiwan has become a focal point in the contest between two great powers. Under the Taiwan Relations Act, the United States maintains a commitment to support Taiwan's self-defence, and in recent years Washington has strengthened this position through expanded arms sales, including advanced missile systems, maritime surveillance platforms and asymmetric defence capabilities, which is aimed at enhancing deterrence against potential coercion from Beijing.

Additionally, the US-China rivalry, despite Donald Trump consistently calling Xi his "best friend" and that they "get along very well", extends beyond military competition towards technology and supply chain security. Taiwan's centrality in global semiconductor production, particularly through TSMC's dominance in advanced chip manufacturing, has elevated its geopolitical value. For Washington, safeguarding Taiwan's semiconductor ecosystem is increasingly viewed as essential to national security and technological leadership. For Beijing, by contrast, losing influence over Taiwan's high-tech sector exacerbates fears of strategic containment.

As both nations are competing increasingly over the past decade, Taiwan is drawn more deeply into the structural rivalry shaping global change. This external competition magnifies Cross-Strait tensions by reducing strategic ambiguity, increasing military signalling and constraining the ability of both Beijing and Taipei to recalibrate the status quo independently. As the Taiwan situation is one key piece of chess between the competition between both sides. Looking ahead, the status quo looks like its to be remained for the next decade at least, how much longer will peace last? We will never know, this situation is very complicated and there are too many potential scenarios of the endgame of the Taiwan Strait. I argue that the status quo is to be continued is because there are two ways of the future of

Taiwan: (1) Reunification with the PRC, (2) Full independence. Both situations are highly unlikely at the current day. As of (1), the majority of Taiwanese citizens despise this idea and the Taiwanese government now currently in control by the DPP is unlikely to proceed with that option. For (2), a full Taiwanese independence, even getting rid of the Republic of China is also highly unlikely, this would have to involve changing the entire Republic of China constitution, which is very hard. Interestingly, there is an element of full Taiwanese independence in the DPP constitution, however, from their tenure in office as the President of the Republic of China (2000-2008, 2016-present),

they have not got around or attempted to change the Republic of China constitution to incorporate Taiwanese independence. Therefore, at least over the next decade, remaining the status quo is the only way forward and any viable alternative is not possible, as an individual which has been monitoring this situation for a couple years now, I really hope that this complicated geopolitical issue is resolved in a grown-up and rational manner, so that the risk of violent conflict could be neutralised. I don't necessarily agree with the KMT most of the time, but to finish I would like to quote the Chairwomen of the KMT party, "Taiwan should not become a sacrificial victim of wider geopolitical competition."

## Global Change in the Perception and Experience of Extreme Cold Weather

Written by Daisy Hoban

Extreme winters have long been the subject of visual culture and images. From early modern European paintings created during the Little Ice Age, to contemporary photojournalism of the current polar vortex in North America, episodes of severe cold have prompted societies to record, interpret, and remember disruptions in climate. However, whilst motifs of snow and ice are recurrent across the centuries, there has been a profound and meaningful shift of perception. This shift reflects both the global change of the increasingly dangerous anthropogenic impacts on the climate, as well as a change in local experience and understanding of extreme weather.

The Little Ice Age is a proposed climatic period of extreme cooling from the 14th to early 19th century. Due to natural holocentric variability, regions of Northwest Europe were mainly affected, resulting in the unusual freezing of urban waterways. Paintings from this period often present this phenomenon as exceptional yet temporary. Depictions of this freezing were popularised by Dutch artists such as Hendrick Avercamp, who repeatedly embedded his 17th century winter scenes with skaters, traders, and happy spectators. The frozen surface acts as a new space which invites socialisation and blurs the boundary between public and private life. The cold is disruptive, however only to the present.



*Hendrick Avercamp, Winter Scene on a Frozen Canal, 1620.*

A similar visual logic flows through Jan Griffier II's *The Thames During the Great Frost of 1739*, which depicts a frost fair. Once again, the frozen river acts as a space of both physical and social movement. When the frozen surface could bear weight, it would become a place of commerce and entertainment. Frost fairs transformed local climatic extremes into an urban festival which encouraged sociability. However, the freezing of the Thames was not entirely dependent on the cooling caused by the Little Ice Age. The infrastructure of Old London Bridge limited the flow of water and partially acted as a weir, enabling ice to form more readily.

Though this was a human mediated environmental change, the contemporary perception and experience of Londoners is much like the subjects of Avercamp's *Winter Scene*. The impact of the bridge altered the local manifestation of winter, but

had no effects on the global climate system itself. The general tone expressed by this genre of painting does not carry a sense of environmental dread that modern day visuals do. Early modern observers of extreme weather viewed these incidents as isolated, and reversible. Winter appears as a social setting embedded with local issues rather than evidence of a systemic environmental collapse. These paintings may represent the some of the last depictions of naturally extreme weather fluctuations before the advent of the Industrial Revolution and resulting anthropogenic climate influence.

Furthermore, there has also been a global change in the perception and commemoration of extreme winters due to the imposition of a global synchronisation of climate awareness. Before global news networks and constant access to climate science, winters were experienced as local events. Winters became notable through local cultural channels such as collective memory, oral tradition, and visual sources. This scale was limited and retrospective; pre-globalisation, exceptional winters were isolated moments in history, not unsettling evidentiary data points which compile part of an ongoing climatic change.

The local archive in Bideford, North Devon, illustrates how another harsh winter, the 1963 Big Freeze, was collectively experienced and reported as a local event. Recollections of the winter of 1963, either orally or through written and visual sources, place it as a reference point for which all winters are to be compared against. This aligns with the notion that winters have historically been made memorable retrospectively, rather than through the immediate scientific interpretation and comparison of today.

The current imagery and narrative surrounding the polar vortex in cities such as Chicago and New York demonstrate how the vastly the scale of perspective and meanings of extreme winters has changed. Current intense freezes are documented and interpreted through climate models and global media networks. Meteorological events are immediately framed and presented to the public as evidence of climatic instability. As the climate crisis continues, there is a sharp decrease in localised, collective memory in places like Bideford. There has been a ratchet effect on the expansion of memory and perspective; it is nearly impossible now to encounter and experience local extreme seasons without feeling the shadow of anthropogenic causation. The Big Freeze was not an anthropocentric event, it was caused by the movement of a high pressure system which brought winds from Siberia to the United Kingdom. This distinction matters for perception: earlier communities could experience and endure extreme winters without the dread of knowing that further winters would likely be much worse.

The privilege of encountering the cold and snow as an isolated novelty has been diminished by climate awareness. We can no longer view weather as an external event, it is now deeply entangled with human action. There has not been a change in the human instinct to record extreme winters, but rather a change in our collective consciousness towards weather. Current records are no longer created simply as a mode to remember, but rather to inform the future. A global and external view of weather is a different form of privilege, as we now have the evidence and knowledge needed to mobilise a global change in anthropogenic activity.

## British Imperialism: The Fall of Great African Kingdoms

Written by Emaad Muhammad

Africa's history has often solely been examined through the lens of colonialism and imperialism. Many extensive empires in its history have been reduced to their role in the slave trade and the supposedly more significant expansion of the British Empire. Here, I will attempt to shed light on some of these empires pre-colonial rule and how the capitulation of these states to British dominance affected the wider African continent

well into the 20th Century. The fall of these kingdoms enacted global change through the shifting of dynamics of Afro-European relations, the creation of national identity for future nation-state development, and through the maintenance and longevity of heritage, cultural symbols, and tradition.

The people of the Asante Empire (1701-1901) posed a threat to the British since the founding of

their land. They had established a strong centralised state with an efficient merit-based bureaucracy and a great system of communication. The economic wealth of the kingdom was reliant on gold and the slave trade, which they supplied to the British and Dutch in return for firearms. Despite this, colonial encroachment was slowly arriving. After numerous treaties being signed and several Anglo-Asante Wars, European imperial ambitions peaked culminating in the empire's dissolution. Their decline, however, was also a result of failing to adapt to rapidly changing global and regional dynamics. The fall of the Asante Empire was clearly a global change ensuring the expansion of the British Empire, yet more so evidences the political subversion by the British through the utilisation of local actors within the Kingdom, seen by exploiting the Hausa people for warfare (most effectively in January 1896). By taking advantage of local divisions, it put in place a global change in thinking. A precedent was set where British hegemony could occur without direct warfare, inherently changing the already tense relationships between states and sowing more conflict into the region.

I will not be using the term 'empire' when analysing the phenomenon that was the Sokoto Caliphate (1808-1903) as it was used derogatorily by the British and became synonymous with 'tribalism'. However, the Caliphate was an extraordinary religious kingdom which ruled on the basis of Islam rather than ethnicity, unconcerned about the nationalities of its people. Their infrastructure was rooted in Sharia Law, and they sustained peace over their 13 emirates prior to their succumbing to British imperialism. This unity sustained a wide and strong economy which had extended grain trade, ensuring that the first fifty years of ruling they experienced zero famines. The leaders (amir al-mu'minin) prided themselves in their legitimate succession to the role alongside developing a strong sense of charisma which placed them on a pedestal for their followers. As a result, the Caliphate intimidated the British. Despite this, it is argued that the Caliphate was destined to fail because of their hesitance to embrace modernity. They lacked a monetary system and militarily they were fundamentally against guns on a religious basis. The army itself was not well-trained with wars occurring in the name of God (jihad) and usually succeeding

through the weaknesses of their opponents. Their fall, however pre-destined it was, still incurred global change through their establishment of a strong sense of nationhood which was maintained by the creation of Nigeria. This is argued by Murray Last who asserts the statement that without the Sokoto Caliphate, there would be no modern-day Nigeria, instead a series of minor states all under colonial rule. We can give credence to this as it is seen how Nigeria perpetuated and advocated for a return to a nation without racial and ethnic division similar to the Caliphate and unlike what had been seen under imperialism. Lastly, the Caliphate were responsible for creating an intellectual sphere where scholars came and disseminated knowledge on literacy, books, and poetry. The fall of the kingdom saw a global change in the creation of Nigeria alongside an appreciation for their nation-state identity on the basis of their cultural heritage.

The Zulu Kingdom's (c.1810-1879) innate cultural assimilation occurred against the backdrop of nineteenth century fears of European intrusion and white settler expansion. This African Empire was a multitiered sociopolitical unit which comprised of many large and small chiefdoms yet retained their sovereignty until the abrupt curtailing of their independence. Their fall was a global change which saw imperial institutions seek to sow seeds of division amongst the unified people whilst simultaneously setting the foundation of colonial domination and apartheid policies. Ironically, it was the fall of the Zulu Kingdom which helped to strengthen the unified Zulu identity as it became a way of showing one's political affiliation and heritage in the face of the colonial authorities. Furthermore, it sustained Indigenous knowledge and promoted social cohesion despite liminal and physical borders and was eventually mobilised by communities for collective action.

The most apt example for this is the utilisation of Zulu culture by the African National Congress (ANC) in South Africa which led to the ending of apartheid; a global change which stems from the roots and traditions of the Zulu Kingdom. The construction of collective memory was essential for the political activism of the ANC as outlined in Ronald Irwin's work. Not only was the founder of the ANC a Zulu man, Pixley ka Isaka Seme, but Nelson Mandela himself refers to the Zulu King Dinizulu ka Cetshwayo, the first honorary

president of the ANC, for having “committed to the struggle against white domination”, ideals which Mandela and other members of the ANC continued. Therefore, had the ANC not leaned on Zulu identity and tradition and the original unity

they promoted, I argue their political action may not have been felt so widespread by the South African people hence showing the immense global change which stems from the fall of the Zulu Kingdom.

## Global Favourites, and the Longer View of the Rules-based Order in Central Sub-Saharan Africa

Written by Tom Karl

While the current struggle of liberal internationalism seems to be a product of recent history, systemic failings within the African continent underline a longstanding fragility within the rules-based order. In the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), the global change has been a regression towards power politics that has prevented the normalisation of ethnic relations and cost the reputation of international governmental organisations (IGOs). Entering a new stage in the DRC’s quarter-century of instability, it is salient to assess the maluses born from a contradiction between productive peacekeeping and western strategic interests.

The DRC has received enduring attention since the conclusion of the Second Congo War (1998-2003). After a multi-national conflict resulting in an estimated 5.4 million deaths, the international community sought construct a new consensus of peace. The wars’ conclusion occurred at the near height of globalism. Its participating nations were convinced that its settlement would strengthen the reputation of the rules-based order, and further underline liberal concepts that had work in previous post-conflict settings. Precepts of a multiculturally sensitive democratisation and reorganisation of the state would form much of the DRC’s obligations within The Sun City Accords (2002). Moreover, the inclusion of regional powers such as South Africa and western institutions like the EU were assurances of the treaty’s success, and buttressed an internationalist concept of mutual responsibility. However, the multilateral reforming program did not conceive of the longstanding issue of western favouritism, nor the return of power politics. Within its provisions existed the points from which instability would reemerge and escalate to the current crisis. For example, the government in Kinshasa claims that progress on ethnic stabilisation has been nearly impossible

because of the lack of a binding security resolutions on Rwanda, its main adversary of the Second Congo War. This issue is a main fixture of Congolese insecurity as the failure to integrate Tutsi militias, allowed for the emergence of March 23 (M23).



*M23 rebels in Goma Photographer: Jospin Mwisha/AFP/Getty Images*

M23 is a Rwandan backed militia responsible for the outbreak of a rebellion in 2012 and the current capture of Goma in eastern Congo in the DRC-Rwandan conflict (2022-present). While the existence of extra-state forces is not uncommon within Africa, the strength possessed by the group and the outbreak of another intrastate clash highlights a further degradation of the international society. Its first violence in 2012 demonstrated a fracturing of the consensus born in 2002 and the establishment of United Nations Organisation Stabilisation Mission in the Democratic Republic of Congo (MONUSCO) in 2010. Over 140,000 civilians were displaced and state security forces were desperately ineffectual after a near decade of supposed reform. Still, the core effort to reimagine the DRC was intact as 13 African signatories and the UN realised the Addis Ababa agreement in 2013. Yet reflection allows a recharacterisation of this moment as a clear point

of departure rather than an anomalous failing. The DRC warned that whilst it was pledged to nation specific points within the treaty, Rwanda was loosely joined into regional commitments of non-interference and non-sponsoring of armed groups. This disconnection reinforced the global change towards non-compliance, and demonstrated a growing contradiction between effective peacekeeping and the strategic aims of sovereign nations.

Rwanda's continued assistance of M23 follows from a variety of aspirations and a questioning on the diplomatic stances of western nations. In part, Rwanda seeks to advance its regional power status, accompanying its economic miracle with military reach. Its bellicose stance also originates from the painful historical legacy of the Rwandan Genocide (1994), whereby the Hutu majority killed 2/3rds of the minority Tutsi. Despite a clear outward aggression, Paul Kagame's administration has denied deep links to M23. A July 2024 report by the UN, however, demonstrates not only heavy weapons transfers close to 1000 lbs, but also direct support of 3000-4000 Rwandan soldiers supporting the campaign. This support appears essential as aside from the city of Goma in northern Kivu, M23 has succeeded in capturing many mining towns. At first, the intention appeared to be the financing of its own operations; however, investigation on the flow of £650,000 in minerals from Rubaya highlights that the Rwanda

government is frequently the end point for the profits. Amid this setting of violation of international treaty, the DRC has argued that its nation has become a victim of a widespread abandonment of the rules-based order. Furthermore, it argues that western nations have newly approached the region with their own subversive intentions. These critiques capture a notable regression as across Europe a fatigue with peacekeeping efforts and a turn towards securing profitable positions has led to a distance from the DRC and closer engagement with Rwanda. In a 2023 meeting to Kinshasa, the French President Emmanuel Macron told the Congolese 'You've proved incapable of restoring your country's military, security or administrative sovereignty'. Coincidentally, this sentiment has coincided with Rwanda's enlarged global presence and connection with the west. Internationally, the Rwandan nation currently provides the third most troops worldwide to the UN peacekeeping force, and the second most within Africa. Within the European continent, it formed a now cancelled asylum agreement with the UK, and a joint mission in Mozambique with the European Peace Facility (EPF). Still, for those concerned with the preservation of global fairness these acts do not excuse them from their violations of law. Yet as M23 continue to advance in the east, the global change of a degradation in liberal internationalism appears more powerful than the hopes to prevent regression to power politics in sub-Saharan Africa.

## Kashmiri self-determination: global change in international law and human rights in an age of post-colonialism

Written by Eva Crawshaw

'Self-determination' has taken on a new meaning for various nations in the post-colonial age. It is no longer a right exercised only by colonised nations controlled by foreign aggressors, but also a right invoked by marginalised communities within a nation. The Kashmiri people, under the control of the Indian government, have voiced their desire for autonomy and self-determination via an unbiased plebiscite in recent years. India's government, however, has spurned these calls, responding to any variance with unrelenting suppression, most strikingly through the 2019 revocation of Kashmir's constitutional autonomy. The Kashmiri case illuminates the global expansion of

international law which occurs when self-determination takes on this new meaning, and shows how a violation of human rights results from recognising self-determination as a right only to be granted in 'colonial' circumstances.

The principle of self-determination first gained legal significance after the Second World War in the United Nations (UN) Charter, providing legal grounding for colonised and marginalised nations to claim independence. The idea originated from Versailles in 1918, when the Allies were faced with the disintegrated successor nations to the Ottoman and Austro-Hungarian Empires. Dividing territories along national lines, the basic premise of

Woodrow Wilson's 'self-determination' in his Fourteen Points, seemed most suitable to the reinstatement of international equilibrium and in the best interest of these new nations. In the decades that followed, the principle hardened into binding international law. Common Article 1 of the ICCPR and ICESCR (1966) declares that 'all peoples have the right of self-determination', a formulation notably broader than the decolonisation-specific language of UN General Assembly Resolution 1514 (1960), and the 1970 Friendly Relations Declaration (Resolution 2625) went further, implying that states which fail to represent the 'whole people' within their territory may forfeit the shield of territorial integrity. The meaning attributed to 'self-determination' thus developed a new significance in the post-colonial age. No longer was it viewed only as a right to be exercised by colonised peoples but by any peoples being ruled by another. India's government rejects this wider definition.

Analysing India's stance warrants an understanding of its Constitution and the history of its international engagements. In 1979, India declared its position on the principle stating that:

the Government of the Republic of India declares the words 'the right of self-determination' appearing [here] apply only to the peoples under foreign domination and that these words do not apply to sovereign independent States or to a section of a people or nation.. which is the essence of national integrity. (Burra, 2017, 22).

India's position is not without force. The concern that an expansive reading of self-determination could destabilise every multi-ethnic state is one shared by much of the post-colonial world, and was recognised by the drafters of Resolution 2625 themselves, who preserved the principle of territorial integrity alongside the right of peoples. On this reading, India's refusal to accept a plebiscite in Kashmir is framed not as a denial of human rights but as a defence of the very principle, non-interference in sovereign affairs, that once shielded post-colonial states from continued Western domination. Yet this defence relies on a narrow conception that international law has itself

moved beyond. To treat self-determination as relevant only to colonised peoples is to freeze it at the moment of its birth, ignoring the ICCPR, ICESCR and Resolution 2625, which all extend the right to 'all peoples'. India's 1979 reservation is therefore less a neutral defence of sovereignty than a rejection of the wider legal consensus that has since emerged, a consensus the Kashmiri case makes impossible to ignore.

This is made clearer by a distinction increasingly recognised in international legal scholarship: that between internal and external self-determination. External self-determination, the right to secede, remains tightly circumscribed, available only in exceptional circumstances. Internal self-determination encompasses a people's right to meaningful political participation, cultural protection, and genuine autonomy within an existing state. It is this second, less dramatic right that India has increasingly been accused of violating, and one that can be honoured without threatening territorial integrity at all.

In more recent years, protests have broken out in universities, some promoting messages in favour of Kashmiri autonomy. The 2013 execution of Mohammed Afzal Guru, carried out in secrecy, provoked widespread dissent among Indian students at Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU) in New Delhi, leading to the arrest of Kanhaiya Kumar, the president of the JNU student union. These students have attracted international attention to the Kashmiri peoples' right to self-determination, a movement complicated by India and Pakistan's seventy-year conflict over the territory.

Kashmir is one of the most militarised areas on the globe, its mountainous terrain the battleground of the longstanding conflict between India and Pakistan. The root of this conflict dates to the Partition of India in 1947, when British India was divided into two separate entities. Kashmir, ruled by Prince Maharaja Hari Singh, was one of around 565 Princely States indirectly under the British Raj. With partition on the horizon the Hindu prince aligned himself neither with India nor Pakistan, instead seeking independence as 'Jammu and Kashmir', a territory with a majority Muslim population. His vision was foiled by an attack by the Pashtun peoples from the North-Western Frontier of Pakistan in October 1947, and he turned to India for support in exchange for the

annexation of Kashmir. India brought the conflict to the UN Security Council in early 1948, claiming Pakistan had supported the Pashtun invaders.

In response, the UN founded the United Nations Commission on India and Pakistan (UNCIP), which until 1953 sought to grant the Kashmiri people self-determination. The UNCIP however failed in this mission. Since 1947, India and Pakistan have fought three wars over Kashmir, and the region is today split between Indian-held and Pakistan-held Kashmir. Indian-held Kashmir has been the site of numerous human rights violations, with officials marked by Human Rights authorities as having used methods of torture and detention to exert control.

The clearest recent illustration of India's stance came in August 2019, when the government abrogated Article 370 of the Constitution, stripping Jammu and Kashmir of the special autonomous status it had held since accession in 1947. The region was placed under direct federal rule, its statehood dissolved, and its people subjected to a

months-long communications blackout, mass detentions of political leaders, and a heavy military presence. The abrogation was a decisive answer to the question of internal self-determination: the Kashmiri people were to have no distinct political voice within the Indian union, let alone a plebiscite on their future. For a government that in 1979 grounded its rejection of self-determination in the language of 'national integrity', the 2019 measures revealed how thin the line between protecting integrity and extinguishing autonomy can become.

The situation in Kashmir today warrants the correct usage of 'self-determination' by India. Indeed, self-determination is a right to be exercised against regional as well as foreign aggressors. A right that, properly understood, need not demand secession, but does demand genuine voice. The recognition of this right by other nations and the UN has initiated a major global shift in international law and provides an expansion for human rights in a post-colonial age.

## Buy, Don't Do: Rainbow-washing and the Commodification of LGBT+ Membership

Written by Kit Beresford

The Decline of Rainbow-washing: Pro-LGBT+ advertising during Pride month has declined sharply in the past year, coinciding with the global rise of right-wing political movements, including the re-election of President Donald Trump. In a recent study of 344 corporations, it was found that 39% of corporations that had changed to pride-themed logos in 2023 did not do so in 2024, and of those, 54% did not in 2025. The sharp drop in corporate pro-LGBT+ campaigns has created concern amongst the community. The shift has highlighted the question of whether corporate support is necessary for marginalised communities, and if so, in what way?

Large corporations have arguably embraced the LGBT+ community not out of moral commitment, but because growing social tolerance has made it a more profitable demographic. Critiques of disingenuous motivations and explicitly hypocritical homophobic policies, such as donations to anti-LGBT+ politicians, have been highlighted in contrast to these marketing strategies (Champlin, 2019). The term

“pinkwashing” has been used to describe this phenomenon, being popularised by Schulman’s (2011) NYT article, arguing that the Israeli government pushed pro-LGBT+ advertisements to distract from their violent treatment of the Palestinian people. Pinkwashing had proved to be an incredibly effective marketing strategy until recently. It has been suggested that the need for societal acceptance by LGBT+ members, who may have been previously rejected from society, motivated an enthusiastic rather than sceptical embrace (Schulman, 2011). Pinkwashing has also been used to refer to critiques of corporate breast cancer awareness campaigns (Carter, 2015). Due to the complex, multi-faceted nature of the term “pinkwashing,” I will use the term “rainbow-washing” to specifically describe corporate exploitation of LGBT+ identity for profit.

The Significance of Corporate Power: “I don’t actually [care] about Chase Bank’s plastered rainbow prints on their floor-to-ceiling windows. I [care] about why they are no longer there: the

incentive structure has changed, and supporting LGBTQ+ rights is now a liability.” - Chrissy, 2025

Chrissy (2025), writer of the publication *Transtrender*, highlights the signalling function of rainbow-washing. This explains the concerns the LGBT+ community had for the lack of rainbow-washing in 2025, despite previous rampant critiques of the shallowness of corporate pandering. Corporations prioritise profit, and therefore will typically pander to the dominant political attitudes of their consumer base (Hayes, & Holiday, & Park, 2022). If the majority would prefer not see support of the LGBT+ community, it signals a decline in acceptance. Beyond being a reflection of societal/political sentiments, corporations hold significant financial power that can benefit communities. Many rainbow-washing campaigns involve donations to LGBT+ charities or increasing visibility of LGBT+ members (Trevor News, 2025). However, this is not to say that these campaigns aren't still largely disengaged - many corporations which financially support LGBT+ causes will additionally donate millions to anti-LGBT politicians for other aims. For example, Lockheed Martin is a large sponsor of D.C. Pride yet has donated over \$2.7 million to anti-Equality Act politicians in the U.S. (Champlin, 2019). It is important to emphasise the fickle nature of corporate support for marginalised communities; despite the significant benefits they may provide, it remains a public relations strategy that shifts with market incentives rather than moral conviction. The profit-driven motivations behind these corporations are reflected in the drop in LGBT+ campaigns in 2025 due to a surge in right-wing sentiments.

**Communal Activism in the Neoliberal Political System:** The embrace of rainbow-washing as a form of pseudo-acceptance, a consumerist expression of LGBT+ membership or allyship, has prevented the establishment of communities capable of political mobilisation. This is a direct result of the neoliberal political landscape, where free-market individualism has become a placeholder for communal activism (Gulson & Webb, 2017). Whereby rather than organising politically, individuals are encouraged to 'vote with their wallets' and express identity through consumption. However, the harsh shallowness of corporate allyship has motivated a prioritisation of sustainable connection. The political defence of the LGBT+ by communities not centred on profit margins will allow for long-term security.

This mobilisation has the potential to be enhanced by taking advantage of the strengths of corporations. The aforementioned financial power of corporations does present advantageous possibilities. Recent studies have shown that corporations have become increasingly concerned with accusations of rainbow-washing due to their poor P.R. ramifications (Ravichandran, 2025). With the communal unity of the LGBT+ community, group purchasing power could be leveraged as a tool to continue to benefit from the financial support of corporations (Hyman & Tohill, 2017). If the lack of explicit and genuine LGBT+ allyship was met with boycotts by the community, there would be a market incentive for corporate support. This would require coordinated critical evaluations of corporations, a challenge, as the vast majority of online accusations of rainbow-washing have been untargeted and vague (Caruelle, 2025). The use of rainbow-washing as a buzzword, as opposed to a powerful label to indicate which corporations are friends or foes of the community, diminishes the potential for purchasing-power strategies. It would be necessary for rainbow-washing critiques to be precise to have an effect. This is further emphasised by the adverse effect that occurs when inaccurate rainbow-washing allegations are made: studies have shown that corporations that engage in genuine allyship are limiting their pro-LGBT+ campaigns due to fears of baseless accusations of rainbow washing tarnishing their brands (Ravichandran, 2025). This has disincentivised displays of allyship and directly harmed the community. However, though a delicate operation, the efficient mobilisation of the LGBT+ community could allow them to take advantage of rainbow-washing and transform it into a useful political tool.

**Conclusion: Chasing the Rainbow:** The suggestion made in this article is an abstract idea which could apply to many other groups that face a form of "washing" by corporations. We must question why corporations have become the primary stage on which social identities are performed. By allowing consumerism to define us, we reject the potential for concrete and reliable group mobilisation as an alternative. The LGBT+ community is a stark example of this failure, particularly in the US, where the rise of anti-LGBT+ sentiments presents a large threat. The possibility for change is still present, and by using rainbow-washing to their advantage, the LGBT+ community could ensure their political survival.

# Legalising Choice: Progress, Pushback, and the Shadow of U.S. Reversal

Written by Miranda Vallis



*Downtown Atlanta protesting Roe v. Wade/ Hyosub Shin*

Abortion has been practiced across societies for millennia, long predating modern legal systems, yet it remains one of the most politically contested issues in contemporary governance. Since Russia became the first country to legalize abortion in 1920, abortion laws have generally liberalized worldwide, a trend that has accelerated over the past fifty years. This progress, however, has been uneven, periods of expansion have been accompanied by rollback and restriction. As a result, an estimated 801 million women of reproductive age still live under restrictive abortion regimes today. Although global abortion law continues to trend toward liberalization overall, recent regressions, most notably in the United States, have generated both symbolic and material ripple effects, reshaping international discourse even as many states move to more firmly entrench abortion as a human right.

Abortion, contrary to popular belief, is not a modern phenomenon. It has been a persistent feature of human societies for thousands of years. References to abortion appear as early as 1600 BC in ancient Egyptian texts, and were well documented in ancient Greek and Roman societies. In these contexts, abortion was not framed around notions of fetal ‘personhood’ like today, but was instead understood primarily in

relation to women’s health and social circumstances, deeming it a practice that was broadly accepted. This perspective shifted in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, when Western states increasingly moved to criminalize abortion through formal legal regulation. Despite these bans, abortion continued, and in many cases increased, often in unsafe conditions that placed women’s lives at risk.

Debates over women’s right to choose have therefore been shaped by a long and shifting history of legalization and social acceptance. The first country to formally legalize abortion was Soviet Russia in 1920, followed by gradual liberalization across much of Europe, North America, and parts of Asia through the mid to late twentieth century. China, for instance, significantly liberalized its abortion laws in the 1950s and later promoted access under the one-child policy beginning in 1979 as a means of population control. The 1970s saw additional progress in abortion rights with the United States landmark Supreme Court decision in *Roe v. Wade*. By federally protecting abortion access across all fifty states, *Roe* positioned the US as an early leader in abortion liberalization and a powerful influence on reproductive rights reforms worldwide.

In the five decades following *Roe v. Wade* more than sixty countries moved to liberalize their abortion laws, often alongside broader improvements on women's health care and reproductive education. Public health data from the 1990s to the 2010s illustrate the impact of these reforms, yielding that countries with broadly legal abortion experienced a 43% decline in abortion rates, while those with severe restrictions and bans saw rates increase by 12%, underscoring the failure of punitive policies. Restrictive regimes not only fail to reduce the incidence of abortion but also drive women toward unsafe procedures, significantly increasing health risks and maternal mortality. Recognizing these consequences, the World Health Organization identified unsafe abortion as a public health crisis as early as 1967, and the United Nations Human Rights Committee, along with numerous regional human rights bodies, has since affirmed access to abortion as a fundamental human right.

Momentum toward abortion liberalization was reinvigorated by the 1994 International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) in Cairo, which reframed reproductive rights as integral to human rights and sustainable development. The resulting declaration emphasized freedom to decide on family size, access to contraception, education, and health care, and crucially addressed unsafe abortion as a public health concern rather than a family planning tool, a common challenge in prevailing anti-abortion narratives. Adopted by 179 United Nations member states, the ICPD established a lasting blueprint for reproductive health policy. In the decades that followed, many countries expanded abortion access. For example, Kenya, which had previously criminalized the procedure, broadened legal grounds in its 2010 constitution to include emergencies and risks to maternal health, and further extended access in 2019 to cases of rape. Similarly, in 2018 Ireland overturned its near-total abortion ban, enshrined in a 1983 constitutional amendment, by legalizing abortion up to twelve weeks and in cases threatening the mother's health. Across Latin America, a new wave of reform, known as the "Green Wave" reshaped the legal landscape, with countries such as Colombia legalizing abortion up to twenty-four weeks and Mexico decriminalizing the procedure. This overall trend in the liberalization of free choice and

recognizing women's fundamental human rights reflect meaningful progress, however, recent regressions in highly influential countries raise critical questions about the implications for reproductive rights on an international scale.

Although only four countries have formally rolled back abortion legality, the consequences have been severe and far-reaching. El Salvador marked the first major reversal in 1998, when a penal code amendment eliminated all exceptions and criminalized abortion in every circumstance, the ban was later entrenched through a 1999 constitutional amendment. Nicaragua followed a similar path in 2006, enacting a total abortion ban despite previously permitting the procedure under limited conditions. More recently, Poland sharply restricted access in 2020 when its Constitutional Tribunal ruled that abortions in cases of foetal impairment were unconstitutional. Since a vast majority of abortions in the country had been performed on these grounds, the ruling amounted to a near-total ban. In each of these cases, regression has been accompanied by rising maternal mortality and unsafe abortion rates, heightened legal and ethical uncertainty for medical professionals facing criminal penalties, and disproportionate harm to poor and marginalized women. These challenges have been further intensified in the three years since the United States overturned *Roe v. Wade* in 2022, amplifying both the symbolic and practical impacts of abortion law reversals worldwide.

The Supreme Court's decision in *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization* overturned *Roe*, dismantling fifty years of legal precedent and federal protection for reproductive choice in the United States. The dissenting justices warned that the ruling would place the US at odds with a global trajectory toward abortion liberalization. Beyond disregarding international human rights and the US' own commitment to the ICPD, the *Dobbs* decision has taken on outsized power abroad, being cited in foreign legal and political debates and contributing to the spread of stigma surrounding abortion.

Since the ruling, *Dobbs* has increasingly been invoked internationally as a justification for weakening or challenging abortion protections. In Nigeria, the governor of Lagos revoked newly issued guidelines on pregnancy termination only

days after their adoption, explicitly citing the US Supreme Court decision. In Kenya, a court had relied on Roe in early 2022 to affirm legal protections for abortion just one month before the Dobbs decision. Shortly after the Kenyan Court of Appeals suspended that ruling as opponents argued that Roe now constituted ‘bad law’. Similarly, in India, Dobbs was raised before the Supreme Court in 2023 to support arguments favouring greater parliamentary authority over reproductive rights. Although these instances have not yet produced sweeping legal changes, they are not anomalies and they illustrate how Dobbs is becoming an increasingly influential reference point for opponents of reproductive choice across diverse legal systems.

Beyond influencing courtrooms, Dobbs has also accelerated a broader global backlash that operates through stigma, intimidation, and the erosion of trust in health-care systems. Where Roe once symbolized progressive legal thought and helped progress public attitudes towards abortion, its reversal now supports governments and anti-abortion advocates to push against progressive legislation and normalize shame surrounding abortion care. The effects are visible across diverse contexts, for example Italian gynaecologists have reported harassment for providing abortions, women in Rwanda face prison sentences and lasting social stigma, and patients in countries such as Canada, Poland, and Indonesia describe being shamed by or unable to trust medical professionals. This climate of fear and discrimination undermines access to care and places already fragile progress toward gender equality, universal health standards, and human rights out of reach. While these issues have existed and continue to exist irrespective of laws in the United States, experts have identified that the

politicization of reproductive rights in highly influential countries like the US does trigger damaging ripple effects worldwide.

Despite these setbacks Dobbs has not gone unchallenged, and in some regions it has served as a warning rather than a guide, prompting governments to reinforce protections for women’s health rights. In France, the right to abortion was swiftly enshrined in the constitution, with the president declaring women’s freedom to choose ‘irreversible,’ while the European Parliament formally condemned the US ruling and affirmed that rollbacks of abortion access contradict fundamental human rights. Across Latin America, the momentum of the ‘Green Wave’ continues, and the erosion of access in parts of the United States has driven Americans to seek safe abortion care in Mexico. In Africa, countries such as Sierra Leone have publicly committed to preserving abortion protections despite global pressure to reverse course. Within the United States itself, Dobbs has also galvanized resistance with 11 state governors issuing orders to safeguard access, abortion rates have risen, and access to abortion medication in certain states has expanded. This underscores that even amid legal uncertainty, the ruling has sparked parallel movements to defend and reclaim reproductive rights.

Ultimately, the global response to Dobbs demonstrates that while abortion rights remain resilient and increasingly recognized as fundamental to health and human dignity, regressions in powerful states can reverberate far beyond their borders, making defense and entrenchment of reproductive rights a shared international imperative rather than a purely domestic concern.

## Diplomacy Without Diplomas: The Role of Youth Social Movements in Shaping Public Policy

Written by Raissa Rambocus

In international politics, authority is traditionally credentialed. Diplomats carry titles, governments issue mandates, and legitimacy is conferred by institutional approval. Yet some of the most consequential political interventions of the past decade have not emerged from embassies or

negotiating rooms, but from classrooms, social media platforms, and streets filled with young people who hold no formal office at all. This raises a provocative question: must diplomacy always be conducted by those with diplomas, titles, or state backing?

Youth social movements increasingly suggest otherwise. From climate justice campaigns to anti-austerity protests and gender-based violence advocacy, young people are acting as informal diplomats. They frame problems, mobilise publics, pressure decision-makers, and translate moral claims into policy demands. In doing so, they challenge traditional models of policy-making that privilege institutional access over social legitimacy.

Traditionally, policy change has been viewed as something driven by political elites. Classical pluralist models focus on interest groups lobbying governments, while institutionalist theories emphasise bureaucratic procedures and formal negotiation. Youth movements sit awkwardly within these frameworks. They rarely possess material power, legal authority, or stable organisational hierarchies. Yet research on social movements demonstrates that influence does not flow only through institutions. Agenda setting, norm creation, and reputational pressure can be equally powerful mechanisms of change.

Young activists excel at all three. By reframing political issues in moral and generational terms, they shift what political scientists call the “Overton window,” the range of policies considered legitimate or necessary. Climate change illustrates this dynamic clearly. Once framed primarily as an environmental or economic issue, it has been recast by youth movements as an existential and intergenerational injustice. This reframing raises the political cost of inaction. Crucially, it does not require formal authority; it relies on narrative power. Social media has dramatically amplified this effect. Unlike traditional lobbying, which operates behind closed doors, youth diplomacy is public, performative, and often deliberately disruptive. Hashtags, viral videos, and micro-campaigns allow young activists to bypass institutional gatekeepers and speak directly to mass audiences. While online activism is sometimes dismissed as “slacktivism,” research on digital mobilisation suggests it plays a central role in agenda-setting and coalition-building, particularly among demographics historically underrepresented in formal politics.

Youth movements also reshape how legitimacy itself is defined. In representative democracies

facing declining trust, young activists often claim moral rather than electoral authority. Their legitimacy stems from lived experience: insecure employment, rising living costs, climate anxiety, or gendered violence. Scholars of deliberative democracy argue that such experiential knowledge can be as politically valuable as technical expertise, especially when policy failures disproportionately affect particular groups.

This is not to romanticise youth activism. Movements can be fragmented, short-lived, or internally unequal. Without formal structures, accountability is often diffuse, and media attention may privilege charismatic individuals over collective voices. Translating protest into policy remains difficult, and governments may engage symbolically without implementing substantive change, a process sometimes described as participatory window-dressing. Yet dismissing youth movements on these grounds misses a broader point. Informal diplomacy has always existed. Trade unions, feminist movements, civil rights organisations, and anti-colonial struggles shaped public policy long before they were welcomed into institutional spaces. What distinguishes contemporary youth movements is their ability to operate simultaneously inside and outside formal politics: submitting policy proposals one moment and staging mass mobilisation the next.

In this sense, youth social movements function as intermediaries between public sentiment and political institutions. They translate diffuse grievances into coherent demands while signalling which issues carry reputational risk. Even when governments resist, they are forced to respond, justify, or recalibrate. Silence itself becomes politically revealing.

“Diplomacy without diplomas” is not a rejection of expertise or institutions. It is a reminder that political influence does not belong exclusively to those who inherit it. Youth movements demonstrate that legitimacy can be built from below, that policy can be shaped from the margins, and that diplomacy, at its core, is not about titles, but about the power to persuade, mobilise, and imagine alternatives. In an of overlapping crises, democracies can no longer afford to dismiss the diplomatic power of the youngest citizens.

# Global Youth Internet Protection Across the World: How is it Affecting the Use of the Internet

Written by Joe Yiu Ip

Over the past few years, multiple nations worldwide have strengthened internet protections for minors, including restrictions on social media content, age verification, and penalties. Internet use had shifted from largely unregulated and laissez-faire parental control, to legally enforced protections embedded in national law. There is historical precedent for online safety, but the current approach is more proactive, driven by more stringent legislation. Is this just paternalistic government oversight? Or an active effort to protect the well-being of young people as they navigate the online world? And to that extent, are young people being included in these discussions and their input being considered in the applications of these laws?

Age Verification and Limits: Online Safety Act (UK Gov) - “The Online Safety Act 2023 ... is a new set of laws that protects children and adults online.” This act, passed in 2023 and implemented in 2024, sought to enshrine social media providers’ responsibility to protect users’ safety on their platforms, including limiting the provision of illegal content, removing such content, and restricting access to age-inappropriate content. It also established new criminal offences to protect individuals from harm online, including: encouraging/assisting self-harm, cyberflashing, threatening communications, and intimate image abuse (from 31 January 2024).

The most significant provision is the duty placed on platforms to restrict content that may be harmful to children; for platforms that publish pornographic or inappropriate content for children, they must have stringent processes to ensure that they are restricted and users are age-verified. Many companies have used third-party verification services such as Yoti, AgeChecked, and OneID, which employ either physical ID verification or age estimation technology. Other companies that lack the funds to verify on their platforms have chosen to withdraw from the UK market.

For example, the digital image hosting site Imgur has blocked access to British users, which has meant that many websites that utilise Imgur as an

image host for their projects, tutorials, etc. have had to change provider. This has been particularly affecting online communities such as Reddit and fan-made wikis for gaming/culture communities. Other platforms, such as Roblox, have introduced controls that prevent certain features, e.g., voice chat, from being available to users under 13, or that prevent 18+ users from interacting with those under 18. Many digital rights campaigners and young people have expressed dissatisfaction with the new laws, citing privacy and safety concerns and arguing that the laws are overly broad.

For example, critical access to communities discussing menstruation, curbing addictions, documentation of war, and support for sexual assault survivors has been blocked for under-18s on platforms such as Reddit, as they are considered ‘NSFW’. Others, such as the Open Rights Group, cite the risks of handing biometric data to third parties and the risk of being digitally tracked by the government, or of censorship occurring under the guise of the act.

With the implementation of the act, has it worked? According to VPN provider Proton, there has been a 1,800% increase in daily sign-ups from UK users following the rollout of the Online Safety Act; however, this has been driven primarily by adult privacy concerns rather than by young people, with 8% of under-18s using VPNs in the past 12 months. This has pushed against counterpoints arguing that the law would push children into circumventing the restrictions.

Digital Services Act (EU): Introduced in 2022, but effective from 2024. This act serves to enhance the protection rights of EU citizens online and, for youth specifically, to reduce exposure to age-inappropriate content and to ban targeted advertising. The DSA forces platforms to make it easier to report and remove illegal content from users’ feeds, increase transparency on moderation and make advertisements more transparent and less deceptive. Furthermore, many have argued that the act has helped prevent disinformation and misinformation by ensuring that content deemed misleading can be removed appropriately. But

critics argue that there may be infringements of free speech; many on the far right have framed the law as an attack on their rights and freedoms. In this context, we observe the movement of some communities toward more extremist and/or hidden platforms, such as those on encrypted services like Telegram or newly built services like Truth Social. Many, including prominent political figures in non-EU nations, have criticised the EU for its regulatory frameworks, which affect the use of data in the United States, where many of these platforms are based.

This act has already preliminarily found that TikTok is deceptively addictive in its design and has failed to meet the requirements for parental and screen-time controls in its app. Reducing users' ability to make decisions about their use of the platform. This may lead to the removal of the infinite scroll feature over time, and other companies may have to follow suit; what has once been hailed as a landmark feature of social media platforms may have to be adapted or removed under these new acts.

Online Safety Amendment (Australia): In 2024, this amendment raised the minimum age for using social media platforms to 16. Fuelled by campaigners and parents' concerns about rising exposure to self-harm content, the amendment seeks to prevent this and safeguard young people from harmful content on the internet. It is very specific about which platforms are restricted and which are not. Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok are among those that require age verification, whereas messaging services such as WhatsApp, Messenger, and Discord, and gaming services such as Roblox and Steam do not.

Young people have voiced discontent with the law; a poll found that 70% did not think it was a "good idea," and 75% planned not to end their use of social media when the law came into effect. This suggests that young Australians may be compelled to use VPNs or circumvent the rules by using their parents' accounts, as up to 53% of parents reported selectively allowing their children to use certain platforms. Some critics are concerned about the

effect on neurodivergent and LGBTQ+ teens from rural communities or those in unaccepting families who may seek assistance or acceptance online, will be cut off from peers in similar situations.

Is the internet changing?: Global youth internet protection has come hand in hand with protection for all users; the laws that protect children also ensure that other adults receive that protection. With respect to restrictions on age inappropriate content, sites that host pornographic content have been forced to ensure that their users are adults and are legal consumers of the content. Individuals with privacy concerns are switching to VPNs to limit online tracking and circumvent restrictions.

Some young people use VPNs not to bypass restrictions but to protect their privacy. Whereas in other jurisdictions, such as Australia, laws may be ineffective because parents' accounts can be used to circumvent age restrictions. Platforms are adapting their services to reduce addiction, and many users are reducing their screen time when possible. These laws signal a shift in how societies view the internet, no longer as an unregulated parallel world, but as a space requiring oversight and limits. With age restrictions now in place in some countries for accessing online spaces, audiences and communities may well adapt to become oriented toward older audiences. With up to 30% of 8–10-year-olds using social media, these new laws could restrict their access to the internet. We could see fewer young people viewing educational, child-oriented videos and toy reviews, and therefore a reduction in such content.

But could this alienate and remove younger voices from the online discourse? These laws tend to restrict young children and adolescents (under 18), and in a world where people increasingly receive news content from social media, could young people be excluded from social movements that have inspired many activists today? Protecting young people online is essential. But protection without inclusion risks silencing the very voices these laws claim to defend. If youth are not part of shaping digital policy, regulation may create a safer internet, but not necessarily a fair one.