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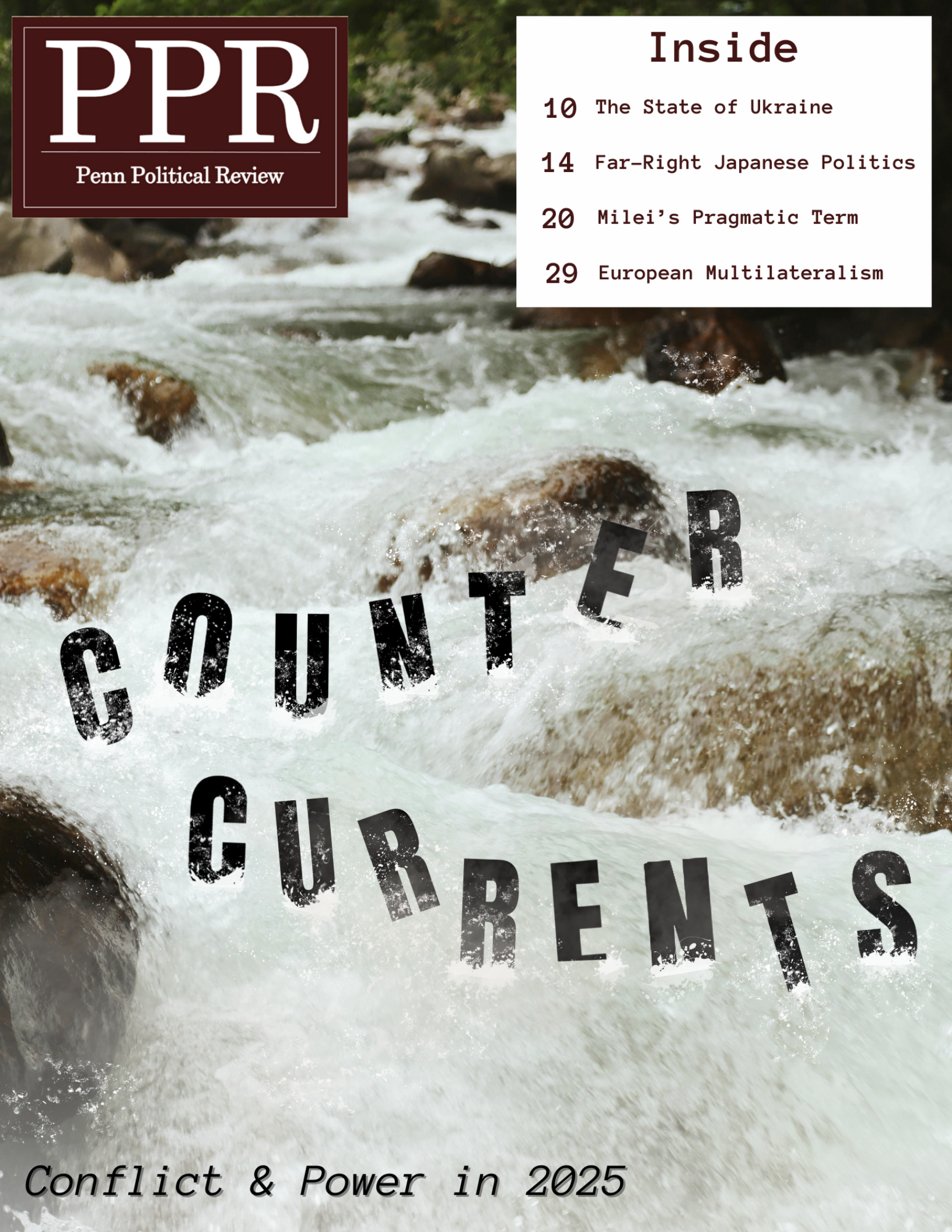

COUNTER CURRENTS

Conflict & Power in 2025

Masthead

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Letter from the Editor

Dear Reader,

I am so honored to introduce Penn Political Review's Fall/Winter edition, entitled *Countercurrents: Conflict and Power in 2025*. As always, I'd like to thank our staff for making this edition possible.

I have been PPR's Editor in Chief for two years. As a graduating senior, I've found myself reflecting on the memories I've made at Penn and within this publication. Who I was at 18 and who I am now at 21 are two very different people, and I attribute part of that transformation to PPR. When Tony, our Managing Editor, proposed our debut *Countercurrents* section to me, I began thinking about how much the metaphor applies to our experience as college students. The project seeks to examine "why the world's political order appears to be shifting in contradictory directions - and how these shifts collectively form a countercurrent to the established political order." But a *countercurrent*, put more figuratively, is something that challenges a mainstream, prevailing opinion. College, much like politics, is shaped by countercurrents. As young people, we're constantly reassessing who we think we are, striving to become better versions of ourselves. Through schoolwork, extracurriculars, and friendships, we're pulled in multiple directions all at once. But it's these directions, these personal countercurrents, that ultimately shape who we become.

The *Countercurrents* section provides us with the opportunity to analyze political reversals across the globe. Written by Tony Kim, Kevin Chen, Austin Alves, Carolina Rassi Constantini, and Wesley Liu, the section argues that such reversals should be seen as disparate events; rather they are evidence of a broader political transformation. In "Satire Died Twice", Anushka Singh examines 2025 Nobel Peace Prize recipient María Corina Machado from Venezuela. Ava Ye addresses China's activities at Scarborough Shoal, an atoll in the South China Sea. Jake Craner provides an update on the war in Ukraine in its fourth year, noting declines in both media coverage and foreign aid. Austin Alves discusses immigration policy, with a specific focus on the circumstances in Los Angeles, through a legal lens. Kevin Chen explains the transformation in Japanese politics with the rise of the far-right movement, including a useful primer on Japanese politics in his analysis. Ayan Sayani traces the evolution of the word jihad in religious and political contexts. Caiden Tobias argues that the United States has used their relationship with the Middle East in a self-interested manner. Carolina Rassi Constantini details the rise of Argentinian president Javier Milei. Wesley Liu surveys Pharmacy Benefit Managers (PBMs) and proposes policy reforms that could reduce drug costs. Naija Agarwal seeks to understand how pro-Western perspectives affect AI governance, which becomes detrimental to sustainable AI systems in the global South. Vasanna Persaud explores nuclear weapons programs in Israel, Pakistan, and Iran. Ferenc Brezo analyzes the European Union, asserting that Europe must adjust its tone and position amid the current international order. Finally, Interview Editor Graham Owens conducts an interview with Josh Eastright, the CEO of Bloomberg Industry Group. In the interview, Eastright discusses his time at Bloomberg, where he started as an intern and stayed for over two decades.

Six months ago, I wrote a letter for our last edition that asked you to take what you read and extend it beyond this edition. Take action. Move beyond political punditry and do something real. Today, I invite you to sit with the political and personal complexities you experience. These pieces might challenge what you know. Let them. Perhaps, like me, the countercurrents in this edition will reshape how you see yourself and the world around you. Thank you, and I hope you enjoy reading.

Sonia Banker
PPR Editor-in-Chief

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Countercurrents: Our World's Political Reversals

Tony Kim, Kevin Chen, Austin Alves, Carolina Rassi Constantini, and Wesley Liu

PPR's New Project

Penn Political Review's new project, *Countercurrents*, examines the global wave of political reversals and provides a platform in which the PPR's staff members can analyze the larger structural forces driving this pivotal moment of transition. With each Staff Writer bringing together case studies across regions, the project showcases how seemingly disparate events are underpinned by common pressures, whether it be economic, ideological, or institutional. The project serves as a cohesive lens for the reader in understanding why the world's political order appears to be shifting in contradictory directions - and how these shifts collectively form a countercurrent to the established political order.

Has History Ended? *by Tony Kim*

In the aftermath of the West's victory in the Cold War, in 1992 Dr. Francis Fukuyama published his groundbreaking novel The End of History and the Last Man. In it, the American political scientist asserts that the collapse of competing ideologies—Communism in 1990 and Fascism in 1945—solidified liberal democracy as humanity's ideological endpoint. Of course political debates would continue to occur, but the establishment of a distinctly liberal, democratic, and global system of politics had, for all intents and purposes, completed history.

However, not even three decades after the Cold War, a perpetual series of political reversals, shockingly uniform in their rightward shift, has called into question Fukuyama's thesis. Especially within recent years, world politics is undergoing abrupt pivots away from the post–Cold War norms of judicial restraint, centrist party politics, economic openness, and institutional predictability. Instead of ideological diversity, today's dominant political pattern is a global swell of countercurrents cresting in unison, eroding liberal norms through abrupt and destabilizing reversals. The following are individual case studies jointly exemplifying how various institutions, regions, and political systems are taking on a distinctly reactionary predisposition, classified here as countercurrents.

SCOTUS: The Judicial Branch's Partisan Reversal *by Austin Alves*

First, the erosion of judicial nonpartisanship in the United States exemplifies how even the most stable liberal institutions can abruptly be restructured. Since the era of the founding fathers, the Supreme Court's emergency docket existed only as a limited tool for urgent relief, while major constitutional questions were resolved through full briefing, oral argument, and written opinions. However, in Vasquez-Perdomo v. Noem, the Supreme Court unexpectedly set momentous precedent using the emergency docket that immigration officers in Los Angeles are now allowed to rely solely on four factors—apparent race or ethnicity (1), speaking Spanish or speaking English with an accent (2), presence at a particular location (3), or the type of work one does (4)—to form reasonable suspicion for stops and detainments.

The recent uptick in the emergency docket's use in deciding controversial, high-impact cases, along with the system's opacity, has led to a growing call for more transparency. The decision from the "shadow docket", another name for the emergency docket, comes amid an insurgence of raids conducted by ICE officers in the county—often targeting individuals of Hispanic appearance or descent as a part of the Trump administration's immigration control policies. The role of the emergency docket in this decision crucially raises questions of accountability, and whether the Supreme Court is fulfilling its duty to check and balance (rather than affirm) the executive branch. In the meantime, many Latino citizens in Los Angeles have had to carry around passports and birth certificates in fear of being detained and interrogated by ICE.

SCOTUS's new assertive posture—amplifying executive power, permitting broader policing discretion, and bypassing traditional judicial procedure—marks one of the clearest examples of a liberal norm collapsing into a right-leaning redefinition of institutional power. This pattern of abrupt rightward turn is not unique to the U.S. judiciary; it is echoed powerfully in the electoral politics of Japan.

Japan's Old Right Wing, Newly Empowered *by Kevin Chen*

If the U.S. judicial shift represents an institutional rightward turn, Japan represents a mass-political one. Amid Japan's most sweltering summer on record, voters delivered a shock: the fringe YouTube-based Sanseito party leapt into power in the the upper house with 14 gained seats, and soon after the long-ruling Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) rallied around hardline conservative Sanae Takaichi as leader. Together, Sanseito's surge and the LDP's own shift

signal a decisive rightward turn in Japanese politics. Before this pivot, Japan's far-right was mostly confined to grassroots street groups like the uyoku dantai, whose loudspeaker vans and nationalist rhetoric brought media attention but rarely translated into parliamentary power. The LDP, though conservative, governed as a broadly pro-business, status-quo force anchored in postwar growth and technocratic management.

Everything changed with the COVID pandemic. A weak yen, rising prices, and decades of wage stagnation eroded faith in the LDP, while record tourism and relaxed residency rules heightened paranoia over foreigners in a homogeneous society. Sanseito weaponized social media and YouTube, whose rhetoric began with vaccine conspiracies but quickly morphed into attacking elites and "Japanese First" messaging. Sanseito deftly framed politics as a struggle between ordinary Japanese and detached establishment parties more concerned with accommodating tourists and foreign workers. Months later, following the resignation of former LDP prime minister Shigeru Ishiba, Sanae Takaichi was able to assemble enough support from the LDP and other parties to lead a hegemonic coalition.

Javier Milei: Where Ideological Fervor Dictates Policy *by Carolina Rassi Constantini*

Just as Japan shows a rightward electoral realignment, Argentina demonstrates a rightward ideological realignment—this time in foreign policy and economic philosophy. Javier Milei, an economist and self-described political outsider, won the 2023 Argentine presidential election with the promise of an ideological rupture from past policy. A central part of this rupture was his refusal to "promote any relation with communists," especially Argentina's two largest export partners, Brazil and China, which together accounted for 27 percent of exports as of 2022. This narrowing of Argentina's trade partners owing to a single man's ideological agenda sharply contrasts the nation's reliance on globalization thus far as a means to relieve its inflation-riddled economy.

Indeed, Milei's foreign policy centered on anti-communist ideals and distancing Argentina from countries "that do not respect the ideas of freedom." He portrayed himself as a libertarian crusader against the "socialist decay" of Latin America, advocating closer alignment with the US and Israel while rejecting deeper relations with China and Brazil. He also criticized Mercosur, arguing that it hindered "the promotion of free trade between nations," and framed Argentina's invitation to join BRICS as further proof of a misguided tilt toward "autocracies."

This ideologically charged rhetoric exemplifies a clear reversal of Argentina's previous liberalizing economic policies. In the years before Milei's election, Buenos Aires strengthened ties with the Global South—deepening relations with China, Russia, and Iran while maintaining Brazil as its largest trading partner. Whereas the Fernández administration embraced globalization as a sign of rising international prominence, Milei condemned these alignments as ideological concessions to communists and promised to undo them if he indeed rises to power.

Domestic Cooperation in a Divided Age: America's Big Pharma *by Wesley Liu*

Clearly, from the previous four examples, factionalism and fratricide is a force manifesting itself in international politics. Unexpected cooperation in America's bipartisan politics, however, can be found in the politics of one of its largest industries: pharmaceuticals. For years, the politics of drug pricing were sharply polarized. Democrats framed soaring prescription costs as a moral failure tied to corporate power, while Republicans warned that heavy-handed intervention and subsidy risked government overreach. But the rapid escalation of medication prices—and growing evidence that Pharmacy Benefit Managers (PBMs) profit when list prices rise—has produced an unexpected point of convergence: both parties now see PBMs as central to the affordability crisis, and both agree that reform is overdue.

In Congress, this shift has taken tangible form. Senate Finance and House Oversight have advanced parallel proposals to curb spread pricing, restrict retroactive pharmacy clawbacks, and require meaningful rebate transparency. At the state level, red and blue legislatures alike have moved to license PBMs, ban the most distorting practices, and strengthen oversight. The result is a rare realignment: healthcare affordability has become a shared economic priority, and PBMs have become the bipartisan focal point.

Countercurrents: The Apt Response to Change *by Tony Kim*

In their totality, these cases reveal that today's political reversals are not merely isolated anomalies but manifestations of deeper structural shifts that demonstrate how liberal democracies respond to pressure. These post-Cold War turnarounds are far too significant, much too expansive not to call into question Fukuyama's assertion that liberal democracy had settled human governance. Rapidly changing dynamics - increased immigration, unstable healthcare infrastructure, and fractured economies - have incited nativism, executive overreach, and nationalism. Yet, just as importantly, it has also inspired unity across formerly divided parties. The trajectory for states is not predetermined; rather, the world as a collective faces a renewed imperative to redefine what competent governance looks like in an era of persistent shock. Otherwise, the world's reactionary pivot may outlast the crises that gave rise to it, becoming indeed, irreversible.

Satire Died Twice

Anushka Singh

"Political satire became obsolete when Henry Kissinger was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize."[1]
Tom Lehrer, American satirist and Harvard-trained mathematician

When Kissinger won the Nobel Peace Prize, satire died for the first time. Now, María Corina Machado has won the prize, and it has died again. The 2025 winner was announced on Friday, October 10 by the Norwegian Nobel Committee in Oslo. Machado is the Venezuelan opposition leader chosen for her efforts fighting dictatorship in the country over the span of many years. The Committee praised Ms. Machado for her "tireless work promoting democratic rights for the people of Venezuela and for her struggle to achieve a just and peaceful transition from dictatorship to democracy."[2]

After she was disqualified from the presidential election by the government of President Nicolás Maduro, the 58-year-old conservative has lived in hiding since last year. For the people of Venezuela, Ms. Machado has been a beacon for opposing the quarter century socialist rule of Maduro. She won the opposition's presidential primary with more than 90% of the vote, which speaks to the crisis on the ground under Maduro's presidency.

In popular media, this win has been greatly celebrated in tandem with the defeat of President Donald Trump's simultaneous campaign for the prize. The optics are in favor of a Latina woman triumphing over the man who was overlooked despite the incessant calls from his fellow Republicans, various world leaders, and himself.[3] At least the integrity of the Nobel Peace Prize lives to see another year.

Perhaps, for many it is satisfying enough to see Trump swallow loss on a global stage, but on closer inspection, the Committee seems to have handed the win to the next best thing.

"I dedicate the prize to the suffering people of Venezuela and to President Trump for his decisive support of our cause!"[4] Machado said, in an X post Friday morning.

"The person who actually got the Nobel Prize called me and said, 'I'm accepting this in honor of you because you really deserved it.'"[5] President Trump's statement after not waking up a Nobel laureate.

To suggest any sort of equivalency between the perseverance of Venezuelans and the U.S. president is in poor taste to the history of the region, which has been the soiled product of Western neoliberalism. For context, Venezuela can best be described as an oil economy containing the largest proven reserves in the world.[6] This makes it a high traffic area for corporate interests. By siphoning this capital out of the country, the hegemonic West made the economy and standard of living for people in Venezuela highly dependent on oil profits. Petrostates stand on slippery slopes, and this one is no exception. Over the years, high oil prices funded ambitious social programs that amassed strong public support. But the 2010s oil glut slashed Venezuela's gross domestic product, shrinking it by roughly 75%,[7] thus impacting their welfare capabilities. By 2018, hyperinflation was rampant with the annual inflation rate hitting 80,000%.[8] A UN expert cited reports enumerating that now nearly 82% of Venezuelans live in poverty and food insecurity today.[9]

Importantly, the American political right and Machado herself have weaponized this economy to demonstrate the failure of socialist policy. However, the past 20 years of U.S. economic sanctions on the nation have wrung out its life force and were described by Venezuelan Foreign Minister Jorge Arreaza as "the worst aggressions to Venezuela in the last 200 years."[10] Beginning with the Bush administration and continuing to the present, the crude oil exports have been subject to rapid rises and falls. The economic crisis at hand cannot be understood separate from the direct aggravations by the United States. In fact, the 2017-2020 Trump administration sanctions on the national oil company, Petróleos de Venezuela (PDVSA), wrought a $17 billion to $31 billion loss in revenue to Venezuela.

To be clear, this is not an exhaustive exploration of the long line of regime changes, coups, and uprisings that are scattered throughout the South American country's history. Rather, it is simply meant to model an answer nonreliant on straw-manning socialism. In February of 2024, Michael Fakhri, UN Special Rapporteur on the right to food issued a statement explaining, "Sanctions have been one factor… constraining the Government's fiscal capacity to implement social protection programmes and provide basic public services." Fakhri underscores the dangers of overdependence on oil revenues and sees the long-term solution as diversifying the economy by boosting local production. As he adeptly puts it, "There was life in Venezuela before oil, and… there must be life after oil."[11]

Now, where does Machado fit into all of this? A longtime U.S. ally, Machado has publicly expressed her support for U.S. sanctions against Venezuela to force-quit the regime. She is no stranger to asking outside actors for support, exemplified by her 2018 letter to Israel Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu beseeching him for help against President Maduro.[12] In her political opinion, "The struggle of Venezuela is the struggle of Israel."[13] Moreover, she vows to privatize the same Venezuelan oil industry that triggered

its Dutch Disease trap to begin with.

The timing of the award is also an important factor to this narrative. The Committee's decision comes amid escalating tension between the U.S. and Venezuela, with Trump continually bombing boats off the coast of Venezuela. The death count of this expansive U.S. maritime deployment in the Caribbean now stands at 83[14] – "narco-terrorists", as the U.S. government calls them. And naturally, Machado has fallen in line with the approach, telling Fox News, "This is about saving lives,"[15] and The Times of London, "It's courageous. It's visionary."[16] Her steadfast support for Trump coupled with the inability to bar Maduro from another term has begun eroding people's trust.[17]

To grapple with the politics of winners like Machado, Kissinger, and even Obama is to recognize the theater of the Nobel Peace Prize entirely. This award repackages the neoliberal performance of diplomacy and democracy to bury their roots in violence. Greg Gandin, Yale University history professor and Pulitzer Prize-winning author, speaks on the new laureate, saying, "It's a perplexing choice… [that] inevitably will bring about the opposite of peace." As a historian of Latin America, he explains further, "They've given it to somebody who's completely aligned with the most militarist and darkest face of U.S. imperialism."[18]

A regime change from Venezuelan President Maduro is long overdue, that much is clear. But it would be counterintuitive to turn to Machado, who plays the puppet begging for more strings. It can only be said that Venezuela's true liberation lies somewhere far from U.S. interventionism. In that same vein, it is somewhat disheartening to see the boost in public morale at this year's Nobel Peace Prize announcement (i.e., Trump lost to a woman? Of color?). When you recognize how identity politics backslides into moral laundering in the wrong hands, you begin to see how easily politicians can make you salivate for scraps. Resist that urge, and hold your political actors to a higher standard.

A Scheme for Scarborough Shoal

Ava Ye

A 58-square mile triangular chain of reefs and rocks, Scarborough Shoal is a coral atoll rich in biodiversity, fish stocks, and a sheltered lagoon for safe harbor—yet its greatest value lies in its strategic geopolitical location in a key maritime corridor of the South China Sea.[1]

Like many locations in the region, Scarborough Shoal is disputed, with claims of ownership from the People's Republic of China, the Republic of China (Taiwan), and the Philippines. The atoll has been under de facto Chinese government and coast guard control since a standoff in 2012, despite its location within the Philippines' Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ), as determined by the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS).[2] It is continuously regulated by the Chinese Coast Guard.[3]

China's presence on Scarborough Shoal aligns with its numerous other violations of UNCLOS following its historic rights claims establishment within the nine-dash line. Along with sending military vessels and unmanned underwater vehicles into the EEZs of neighboring countries, Beijing has also reportedly interfered with other nations' fishing and petroleum activities and harassed civilian vessels with water cannons and blocking maneuvers.[4]

Chinese activities at Scarborough Shoal have remained a specific cause for concern for the Philippines, who initiated an arbitration against China under UNCLOS in 2013. Three years later in 2016, the tribunal ruled that China's blocking of Scarborough Shoal and its harassment of Philippine personnel at the atoll was illegal. This ruling triggered the United States to extend the Mutual Defense Treaty with Manila to cover attacks on Philippine personnel anywhere in the South China Sea. China, however, has rejected this ruling as "waste paper," continuing to violate UNCLOS and maintain effective control of Scarborough Shoal.[5]

In the thirteen years of Chinese presence on this atoll, a critical fishing ground, no country has built permanent structures or facilities on the island.[6] However, in September 2025, China revealed the establishment of a nature reserve spanning 8,700 acres on the northeastern side of the shoal, with its coral reef ecosystem positioned as the main protection target. The reserve also overlaps with an area that sustained extensive damage from Chinese giant clam harvesting in the 2010s, now overseen by China's National Forestry and Grassland Administration.[7]

This announcement comes after accusations from Philippine officials of significant reef damage across the South China Sea by Chinese military activities.[8] Yet now, the same officials are publicly condemning the reserve, describing the move as "illegitimate and unlawful" and a "clear pretext for occupation."[9] Philippine officials see militaristic potential for Chinese activities on the atoll, a continuation of China's assertion of power in the South China Sea and surrounding regions. These concerns are backed by empirical precedents: China has been involved in a series of disputes over similar geographical features like the Senkaku Islands and Mischief Reef, even building artificial islands to form a "Great Wall of Sand" in the Spratly and Paracel Islands. Thus, the question international leaders ask regarding Scarborough Shoal is as follows: is China's new nature reserve really a nature reserve—or a ploy for control?

Assuming Philippine suspicions to be true, China is taking a new approach to constructing its sphere of influence: pursuing aggressive territorial expansion under the veil of environmental conservation. This strategy is a smart geopolitical move: Dr. Jill Goldenziel of National Defense University explains that "By establishing a nature reserve, China uses its domestic law to provide a veneer of legitimacy for its attempt to establish sovereignty…China also presents itself as being a protector of the environment in the South China Sea, making it look like China is enforcing the spirit of arbitration, if not its terms."[10] By

suddenly declaring Scarborough Shoal as a protected area, China is not only establishing a more permanent presence on the island, but also responding to pollution accusations by characterizing itself as an environmental protector.

The nature reserve also presents challenges for countries beyond China and the Philippines. Dr. Goldenziel continues, "the US has recognized the 2016 [UNCLOS] Arbitration as legally binding…If the Philippines decides to assert its claim to the shoal—or its rights to fish in its EEZ—the US will be forced to decide if and how to support its ally. Its answer will have tremendous implications for the strength of the US-Philippine alliance—and could risk broader confrontation with Beijing."[11]

Though the portrayal of China's nature reserve as deceptive and dangerous seems plausible, one could also argue that China is not as aggressive as Western media suggests. Chinese activities in the South China Sea may be viewed as reasonable defensive responses to increasing US presence in the region, including American access to several Philippine military bases near Taiwan. After all, American activities in the South China Sea never seem to attract the same criticism, even when the Chinese could perceive these activities as encroachment into their military bases in Cuba or Central America— actions that would surely spark American retaliation if roles were reversed.

The idea of Chinese commitment to environmental progress is possible: China has indeed made large efforts towards environmental conservation and renewable energy, and is on track to achieve its goal of carbon neutrality before 2060.[12] Scarborough Shoal has suffered at the hands of clam harvesters in the past, and China may very well be working to reverse this damage.[13]

Regardless of China's intentions, the nature reserve on Scarborough Shoal is certainly perceived by international audiences as a strategic geopolitical move rather than a sincere effort towards environmental protection. Ultimately, a tiny atoll in the South China Sea proves to have significant implications for international relations within the region and beyond.

The State of Ukraine: How Global Attention Is Shifting Amist Prolonged War

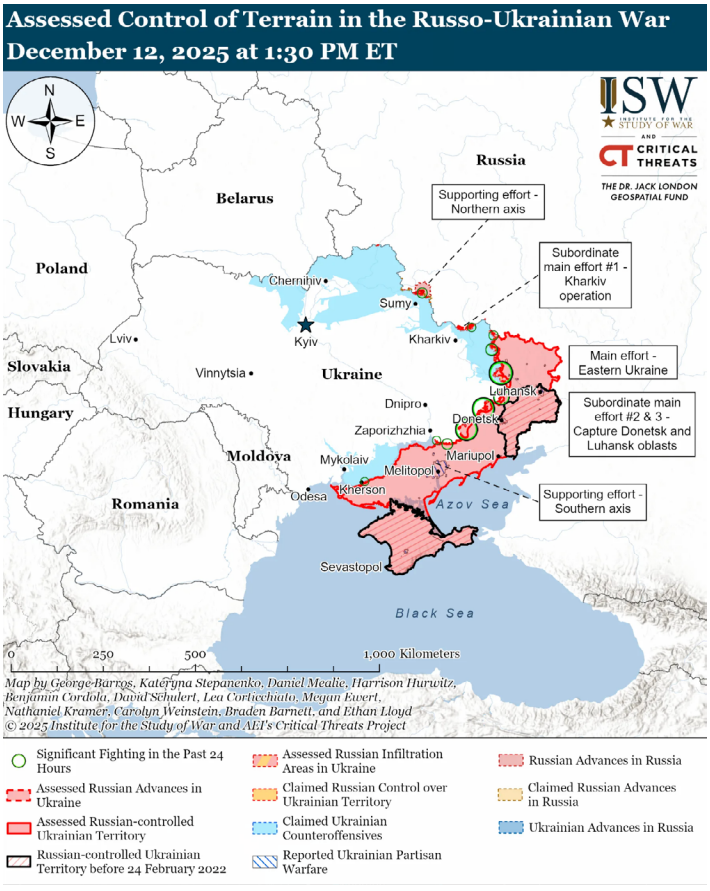
Jake Craner

Problems are brewing in Kyiv. As the war in Ukraine enters its fourth year, key pressures are mounting: Western public attention is waning, aid commitments are increasingly stretched, and Russia seems to be betting on attrition and distraction, while Kyiv must search for fresh strategies to retain allies. Every additional bomb dropped from Russian planes and every new Ukrainian soldier selected to fight on the front lines makes an ending to this conflict that involves a free Ukrainian state much less likely.

In the early months of the invasion, Ukraine dominated global headlines. Major news outlets in America and Europe had designated correspondents, war-zone dispatches, and visceral coverage of destruction, displacement, and battlefield heroism. Yet over time, audiences grew weary. Western media outlets were churning topic rotations, often treating Ukraine as "just another conflict." Over sixty-six percent of Americans recently stated that they are pessimistic that a Ukraine-Russia peace agreement can be reached.[1] Further, a study has suggested that Western media continue to frame the war predominantly in "war journalism" terms rather than "peace journalism." This means that the American public is hearing more about the deadly violence and destruction that occurs in Ukraine and Russia instead of diplomatic efforts to end the war.[2] Thus, it is clear to see how this messaging can lead to a bleak outlook on the war by the American public.

Additionally, other conflicts have now captured the attention of the West. The most notable of these is the Israel-Palestine conflict, which began around a year and a half after Russia first invaded Ukraine. Since October 7, 2023, Western media has thrust the Israel-Palestine conflict into the spotlight, sometimes prioritizing it over Ukraine-Russia. A recent study by the Pew Research Center found a seven percentage point difference between those who find the Israel-Palestine conflict personally important and those who find the Ukraine-Russia war personally important.[3] This lowering salience is crucial because media coverage helps shape donor-state perceptions, accountability pressures, and the ability of Ukraine's leadership to argue for continued support: their only leverage. Parallel to media decline is evidence that many Western governments are pulling back or stalling on pledges. In July 2025, Reuters reported that U.S. foreign aid programs through USAID had been dramatically scaled back, forcing layoffs among NGOs in Ukraine and suspending critical services.[4] The U.S in particular has been criticized for delays in military deliveries, which Ukraine's defense minister states have cost lives on the frontline.[5]

This political signal does not bode well for Ukraine. As donor states juggle inflation, energy costs, debt burdens, voter fatigue, and new foreign contingencies, some are increasingly uneasy about sustaining open-ended commitment to Ukraine as highlighted by the recent U.S. government shutdown. Russia's strategic calculus hinges on precisely this since its doctrine appears refined around the principle of attrition. If Kyiv cannot secure sustained flows of ammunition, air defense, and advanced systems, front lines may stall, and new territorial gains for Ukraine become harder. Russia also thrives politically from any perception of a fracturing Western alliance. Official government websites such as Germany's Federal Ministry of the Interior have warned citizens about Russia's disinformation campaigns designed to steer public opinions from supporting Ukraine to backing Russia.[6] In effect, Russia is pressing a "war of attrition" both militarily and diplomatically: allow foreign publics to get weary, deepen domestic debates over aid, and hope that in time, political cycles or crises elsewhere will push Ukraine off the agenda.



One of the most significant wildcards for Ukraine is elections in donor countries. Domestic politics, partisan polarization, and new crises are all recalibrating how electorates view foreign aid. In the U.S., public appetite for Ukraine aid is volatile. A Pew survey in November 2024 (around the U.S presidential election) found fifty percent of Americans supported the idea that the U.S. military has a responsibility to support Ukraine. A Trump administration taking power with more isolationist tendencies swung momentum against Ukraine. The same poll in March of 2024 dropped the percentage to forty-four, representing a minority of the American people.[7] Further, European support is eroding faster after the U.S election: a December 2024 YouGov poll across seven European states found that backing "until victory" for Ukraine had declined sharply, and that many now favor negotiated settlement over a total Ukraine victory.[8] Interestingly, surveys from as early as 2024 suggest only around ten percent of Europeans believe Ukraine can still militarily defeat Russia, with most preferring a compromise peace.[9] That shift reflects deeper war fatigue and raises the political cost for leaders advocating continued escalation. In a host of European democracies, elections are looming. As voters face economic pressures, energy inflation, refugee challenges, and domestic austerity, the salience of a distant war starts to fade. Ukraine must adopt a different rhetoric: rather than framing aid as open-ended moral support, Kyiv should portray their fight as in the geopolitical interest of donors (deterring Russia, defending the liberal international order). It is not enough to merely help a friend: citizens of the West must believe that they are benefiting themselves by supporting Ukraine.

Against this backdrop, Kyiv must strategize intelligently. The first line of defense is narrative. Ukraine must stay ahead of media fatigue and political drift by increasing theiremphasis on showcasing battlefield gains, human resilience stories, and linking Ukraine's cause to donor security. Second, internal reform and signaling credibility are imperative. If Kyiv can credibly demonstrate strong governance checks, efficient use of aid, and minimized corruption, their political case in donor capitals is strengthened. Demonstrating "skin in the game" domestically helps counter the narrative that Ukraine is a bottomless money pit. Finally, Ukraine must be nimble in alliance management: rallying fractured donor coalitions, mediating among EU member states, and seeking binding multi-year aid commitments that reduce uncertainty. In short, Kyiv must convert goodwill into durable contracts before the political winds shift further against their cause.

Putin is essentially playing a long game by exhausting donor resolve, amplifying distraction elsewhere, and letting global volatility do his work. Ukraine's task is to shorten that clock by converting present goodwill into guaranteed commitment and to remain too important to ignore.
The best way to do so is by framing their cause as one of importance not just to them, but to countries who support them as well. As the war moves closer to its fourth year, Kyiv has their work cut out for them, but they also possess a playbook to reclaim the Western attention it so desperately needs to fight off the Russian invasion threatening its democracy.

LA Ice Raids, SCOTUS, and the Future of US Immigration Policy

Austin Alves

Introduction

It's no secret that immigration has been a central focus of the Trump administration. From limiting the duration of student visas,[1] to deploying troops to the southern border, to carrying out mass deportations,[2] the president has advanced a strict agenda hostile to foreigners. Notably, raids have been conducted by Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) officers across the country—from Los Angeles to New York to Miami, and even Philadelphia[3]—often targeting individuals of Hispanic appearance or descent.[4] Consequently, the Department of Homeland Security—which oversees ICE—has faced numerous class-action lawsuits for these raids, such as Noem v. Vasquez Perdomo. In September, the Supreme Court ruled on this case in favor of the government. Supporters of Trump's immigration agenda view the decision as a victory enabling enforcement of the administration's policies. Contrarily, critics argue it violates the Fourth Amendment and legalizes racial profiling. Beyond concerns of equal protection, however, their misgivings extend to the way in which the decision was made: through the Supreme Court's *emergency docket*.

What is the Supreme Court's Emergency Docket?

When you think of a Supreme Court case, you are probably thinking of the "merits docket": the court hears oral arguments from both sides, deliberates for several months, and then issues lengthy opinions. However, in cases decided on the emergency docket—sometimes called the "shadow docket"—no oral arguments are made, rulings are expedited, and there is often little or no explanation to the decision.[5] First coined in 2015, the term "shadow docket" calls attention to how such cases "lack the transparency that we have come to appreciate in [the Supreme Court's] merits cases."[6] Over time, an increasing amount of emergency docket decisions have been released with written opinions, but with this proportion remaining at just 28 percent,[7] there exists a growing call for further transparency.

Unlike cases on the merits docket, rulings on the emergency docket are not final; instead, the decision is temporary, one that will remain in effect until the appeals court rules otherwise, or certiorari is granted. As such, it is often used to address urgent routine matters, like requests for time limit extensions on filing briefs. However, the recent sharp increase in use of the emergency docket—from 44 applications in the '23-'24 judicial term[8] to 113 during the '24-'25 term[9]—and its use in deciding controversial, high-impact cases has caused alarm for many. One such case is *Noem v. Vasquez Perdomo*.

Noem v. Vasquez Perdomo

Beginning in early June, masked ICE agents in Los Angeles began stopping, interrogating, and arresting residents—some of which were U.S. citizens—at workplaces, bus stops, and businesses.[10] ICE can conduct warrantless searches and detentions within 100 miles of any U.S. border. Yet just like any law enforcement agency, they are bound by the limits of the Constitution: reasonable suspicion is needed to conduct a stop, and probable cause is needed for a search or arrest.[11]

The initial complaint was a class action filed by several entities, including individuals who themselves were detained by ICE, as well as organizations—such as the Los Angeles Worker Center Network—whose members were affected by the arrests. The complaint alleged that ICE's "roving patrols" in Southern California were stopping people based only on broad profiles, including race and ethnicity, not reasonable suspicion.[12] Following this, a federal district court judge granted the request for an injunction and issued a temporary restraining order preventing future stops and arrests. The court stated that

ICE may not rely solely on four factors—apparent race or ethnicity (1), speaking Spanish or speaking English with an accent (2), presence at a particular location (3), or the type of work one does (4)—in order to form reasonable suspicion.

In response, the government filed an application for a stay—pending appeal—with both the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals and the Supreme Court, on the basis that the injunction would upend the enforcement of immigration laws in Los Angeles.[13] The Court of Appeals denied the motion, but on September 8th, the Supreme Court granted the stay. In the concurring opinion, Justice Brett Kavanaugh wrote:

> "Whether an officer has reasonable suspicion depends on the totality of the circumstances. Here, those circumstances include: that there is an extremely high number and percentage of illegal immigrants in the Los Angeles area; that those individuals tend to gather in certain locations to seek daily work; that those individuals often work in certain kinds of jobs, such as day labor, landscaping, agriculture, and construction . . . and that many of those illegally in the Los Angeles area come from Mexico or Central America and do not speak much English."[14]

In her strongly worded dissent, Justice Sonia Sotomayor stated that this decision "has all but declared that all Latinos, U.S. citizens or not, who work low wage jobs are fair game to be seized at any time, taken away from work, and held until they provide proof of their legal status to the agents' satisfaction."[15] She noted that a set of facts—i.e., Mexican ancestry, speaking Spanish, working certain types of jobs, etc.—cannot constitute reasonable suspicion if it also "'describes a large population of presumably innocent' people."[16] Therefore, such characteristics alone are not enough to justify stops by customs agents.

What Does This Mean for the Country?

The Supreme Court's ruling in this case elicits various concerns. First, as Justice Sotomayor noted, it erodes the Fourth Amendment's protections by allowing for broad overgeneralizations to justify arbitrary interrogations by ICE officers. As Stanford Law professor Jennifer M. Chacón points out, the Supreme Court's permission of race as the sole factor in reasonable suspicion is particularly problematic given its "hard line against any reliance on race in other contexts," such as affirmative action.[17]

Beyond this, the decision also raises questions about executive accountability and the legitimacy of Trump's immigration policies.

On the first subject, there exists a partisan pattern to the rulings: all judges who held that ICE did not meet the standard of reasonable suspicion—on the District Court, Appeals Court, and Supreme Court levels—were Democratic appointees.[18] On the other hand, the remaining six Supreme Court Justices who ruled otherwise were appointed by Republican presidents. This, along with the aforementioned increase in the emergency docket's use, prompts a chilling question: if the Trump administration can steamroll legal challenges using the Supreme Court's conservative supermajority to obtain favorable rulings via the emergency docket, how will the judicial system fulfill its duty of checks and balances on the executive branch?

Furthermore, the very logic behind the Supreme Court's decision undermines the legitimacy of the immigration policies it enforces. If illegal immigrants tend to "work in certain kinds of jobs, such as day labor, landscaping, agriculture, and construction," and are necessary to fill shortages in those industries,[19] mass deportations will fail to achieve the current administration's purported purpose of immigration enforcement: increasing employment opportunities and wages for citizens.[20]

In the meantime, Latinos in Los Angeles—and across the U.S.—must live on with the constant lurking threat of being detained by ICE, just because of their appearance. As a precaution, some have already begun carrying around their passports out of fear of being stopped.[21] Their future livelihood will come to depend on renewed legal challenges that ensure ICE's actions are restored to targeted, specific operations—and not indiscriminate frisks based on race.

"Japanese First": The Rise of Far-Right Politics in Japan

Kevin Chen

Introduction

Amidst Japan's most sweltering summer ever on record, Japanese voters casted ballots in the upper house elections, and the far-right Sanseito party was red-hot: catapulting from a fringe Youtube movement to adding 14 seats on July 20 in the upper house.[1] Just months later, the ruling Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) picked hardline conservative and Shinzo Abe protégé Sanae Takaichi as its new leader. Already, Takaichi has engendered major controversy by supporting military intervention against China if they invaded Taiwan, bucking decades of Japanese precedent of strategic ambiguity over the issue.[2] What's unfolding in Tokyo reflects a broader post-COVID trend: a democratic revolt against incumbents worldwide paired with a surge in right-wing populism. Yet at the same time, Japan's political situation carries distinctly Japanese features. Japan's drift to the far-right is best explained by three intersecting forces:

1) The rise and weaponization of online politics, specifically Sanseito's youtube channel.
2) A cost-of-living squeeze and a weak yen that fueled a distrust of the LDP.
3) Rising concerns over foreign immigration and overtourism.

A primer on Japanese Politics

Japan's system of government is a parliamentary democracy, composed of a figurehead monarch, an executive branch, a legislative branch, and a judiciary. The executive branch is composed of the prime minister and cabinet, and is responsible for enforcing the laws. The legislative branch, called the Diet, is a bicameral legislature, composed of the lower and upper house, the former carrying more influence than the latter. Governments are formed by parties or coalitions that can reliably command a lower-house majority, with the prime minister having the power to dissolve the lower house and call an election. For the upper house, half the chamber is elected every three years. Some of these seats are prefectural districts, where voters write one candidate vote and the candidate with the most votes wins the election. The other ballot uses a nationwide proportional ballot (open list), and parties only need to clear a certain percentage of votes to be allotted a seat. For example, if 50 seats are up for election, a party winning just 2% of the vote can be allotted a seat.[3] This is good news for smaller, radical movements like Sanseito. But their shocking success is the product of more than just simple legislative design.

The Rise of Online Political Engagement

Far-right politics in Japan has historically arisen through unconventional, grassroots means. Uyoku Dantai, which roughly translates to "right-wing groups" have long taken to the streets to air frustrations over foreigners, Japanese responsibility over WW2 warcrimes, and other minority groups like Zainichi Koreans living in Japan. Characteristic is their usage of propaganda vans called gaisensha, adorned with Rising Sun Japanese flags and adherents speaking their mind through loudspeakers.[4] But whereas these groups have largely been ignored by Japan's electorate, Sanseito has successfully appealed to broader cross-sections of Japanese society with its own outside organizing.

Sanseito's leader, Sohei Kamiya has long had a youtube channel called Channel Grand Strategy that consistently pushed right wing talking points. The Sanseito party itself took advantage of the rapid rise of the internet with its own YouTube channel, which started during COVID-19. It began by spreading conspiracy theories over vaccines and the 2020 election, but quickly morphed into broader attacks against foreign influence and a suffocating cost-of-living crunch. Today, Sanseito's YouTube channel is three times the size of the ruling LDP's channel, and various indications have shown that Sanseito's online political strategy has been effective.[5]

According to exit polls, over 70% of Sanseito's supporters relied heavily on social media, which an Association for Computing Machinery study has found to be effective at funneling people from mainstream to radical spaces through algorithms.[6,7] Sanseito's tight knight communities constantly spread and reshared extremist content, building echo chambers that encouraged "us vs them" rhetoric. This pitted Sanseito's adherents who felt they've been shut out of the political process against the dominant establishment parties painted as out-of-touch elitists.

A Shrinking Economy

Ample evidence has shown that radical politics, especially far-right politics surges when a country's economy stumbles. A Kiel Institute Study has found that unexpected jumps in inflation raises voter shares for more radical/populist parties.[8] Additionally, elections around the world like the EU parliamentary elections and the 2024 US election have consistently demonstrated that economic insecurity remains on the top of voter concerns and has triggered support for far right candidates against center left

incumbencies. Japan reflects this broader trend. 75 years ago, the country underwent a miraculous transformation from a war-torn crippled country into a global economic superpower. But by the late 1980s, such growth abruptly halted as asset prices tumbled. What became the "Lost Decade" quickly became the "Lost 20 Years" and the "Lost 30 Years" as successive crises in the Great Recession and the 2011 Tsunami continued to batter Japan.[9] Between 1995 to 2023, Japan's Nominal GDP fell from 5.33 trillion to 4.21 trillion, its real wages fell 11%, all while the country experienced rare deflation.[10,11]

However, with the rise of the COVID-19 pandemic, price levels rose for the first time in decades due to supply side pressures. Additionally, a poor rice harvest led to spiraling rice prices, which in turn led to increased rice imports. Growth was further restricted as Japan locked down in response to the pandemic. These economic pressures plagued the previous PM Shigeru Ishiba as he struggled to stave off falling real wages, a weak yen, and a persistent cost-of-living crisis that was caused by these initial pressures. This compounded with the LDP's slush fund scandal caused voters souring on the ruling LDP coalition government, leading to the lower house losing its LDP majority in 2024, and recently its loss over the summer of the majority in the upper house as Sanseito gained 14 seats.[12]

The Politics of "Japanese First"

Japan remains one of the most immigration-averse, homogeneous OECD societies, with 97.5% of those residing in Japan being ethnically Japanese.[13] Amidst this environment, Sanseito exploits frustrations over two twin phenomena: the relaxation of foreign residency laws and a record tourism boom.

To shield the labor force from a persistent population decline, Tokyo broadened its Specified Skilled Worker system, expanding "SSW-2"classification in 2023 to more industries besides construction and shipbuilding. Those with the classification can stay in the country indefinitely with accompanying family, all while allowing them to skip Japanese language tests.[14] At the same time, inbound visitors hit all-time highs at 36.87 million in 2024, making the foreign presence in Japan unmistakable to the electorate.[15]

Flashpoints over the "manners" of these foreigners have only contributed to national animus. For example, Kyoto's Gion district restricted tourists from private alleyways after resident concerns about overcrowding, and similar concerns prompted officials to add crowd-control gates and fees in Mount Fuji.[16,17] In one notorious incident, the town of Fuchikawaguchiko erected a physical screen to block tourists from taking pictures at a famous spot known for showing Mount Fuji in the background of a convenience store.[18] To address over-tourism, the government even created a new body to address "concerns over foreigners."[19] Sanseito has converted these frustrations into incendiary rhetoric warning of a "silent invasion," uniting supporters under a "Japanese First" banner that converts furor over the perceived disrespect for local norms into calls for tighter migration control.

Conclusion

Sanseito's summer surge and the LDP's tilt toward Sanae Takaichi are more than just electoral flukes, they represent a fundamental shift in Japanese politics towards the radical right. The pattern echoes post-COVID politics elsewhere: incumbents punished amid sticky prices and falling wages, frustration with establishment party machines, and an online ecosystem where movements that start on social media and YouTube can build identity, money, and turnout. Yet the drivers are distinctly Japanese. Japanese upper-house electoral rules let otherwise fringe constituencies achieve political power; while a uniquely tense distrust of foreigners amidst a culturally homogenous society normalizes hawkish rhetoric. In short, global anti-incumbency trends intersected with Japan's socioeconomic crises allowing the far-right to capitalize.

Jihad: A Term by the West, for the West

Ayan Sayani

If you have been following the news lately, there's a solid chance that within a 20 minute interval, you'd see the word "jihad" associated with an act of violence by an individual or group of Muslim origin. When journalism interacts with unfamiliar religious terminology, there is always a risk of oversimplification with a side of fear-driven framing. But jihad is not inherently a violent term. Originally, it was a term of spiritual struggle, yet over the decades it has been reinterpreted, might I suggest, instrumentally, in political media and military discourses. While this term has a long and complex history in its semantics, contrasting its historical and modern relevance warrants a more critical lens of view, especially given how frequently 'jihad' appears in contemporary news and public discourse.

So, if not a call for the deliberate destruction of Western civilization, what is jihad supposed to mean? The term jihad (جهاد) in Arabic, derived from the root j-h-d (ج-ه-د), generally signifies (though like any interpretation extracted from the Qur'an, it is open to discussion and varying views) "to strive exert effort, struggle or bear hardship." This root may manifest in different forms within the Qur'an including jahada (جَاهَدَ "he struggled") yujahidun (يُجَاهِدُونَ, "they struggle") and mujahid (مُجَاهِد, "one who struggles").

Of the Qur'anic verses that mention jihad, the concept is usually framed as a call to moral, spiritual, or even intellectual action. For instance, "And strive for God with the striving due to Him" (22:78). This is clearly not suggestive of any form of physical violence, but rather personal discipline and the ongoing struggle to live righteously. Thus, we see the term jihad in the Qur'an as more of an inward effort, something closer to moral resistance or self-betterment. But of course, one verse doesn't prove the whole story. So, to examine another verse which reads, "So do not obey the disbelievers, but strive against them with it [the Qur'an] a great striving" (25:52), where the "struggle" in reference here is explicitly intellectual and communicative against violence. Even in passages that address physical confrontation (sometimes referred to as the "lesser jihad"), the ethical constraints don't seem to be akin to the brutal butchery jihad's is referred to as, "Fight in the way of God those who fight you, but do not transgress — God does not love the transgressors" (2:190). On top of that, the Qur'an also states, "Permission [to fight] is given to those who are being fought because they were wronged" (22:39). This emphasizes any physical fighting as more of a response, and is thus to be constrained solely as such under Islamic principles. Importantly, the Qur'an includes: "There is no compulsion in religion" (2:256), which is often interpreted as rejecting forced conversion. In another verse (25:52), the Prophet is instructed to conduct jihad "with the Qur'an — a great striving," which suggests a primarily intellectual or spiritual dimension.

However, jihad has also been theorized in more aggressive forms. "Historically, early Muslim empires, like many other empires of the period such as Byzantium and contemporary Christian states, expanded through violent force."Thus, it is true, as many of us saw in middle school history class, that Muslims used armed struggle in conquest. However, the association of an Islamic armed force with the word jihad is the primary discrepancy to highlight, as many scholars, Muslim or not, agree that the Qur'an does not clearly endorse a universal doctrine of offensive jihad; its normative prescriptions stay within the bounds of self-defense and community protection much more than mentions of conquest.

Over centuries, interpretations of jihad really started to evolve under political and military pressures. Especially in the last 4-5 decades, we see the emergence of direct association of the word jihad with offensive violence. Scholars generally date this emergence of "global jihad" ideology to the late 20th century in response to geopolitical conflicts.

The example I'll choose to highlight of relevant global conflict is the U.S's involvement during the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979. The U.S. and its allies supported local Afghani resistance groups (which you may know as the mujahideen) against the Soviet forces.[1] Scholars of historic religious violence purport that education initiatives, like US-sponsored funding for textbooks, deliberately displayed militant imagery and language to prime a religious basis for Afghani resistance to the Soviets.[2] At this time, it wasn't uncommon to find material distributed in Afghanistan in the 1980s that included scenes of weapons and references to jihad.

Specific examples of those textbooks include the so-called Pashto and Dari primers commissioned under USAID and the University of Nebraska's Center for Afghanistan Studies (CAS).[3] These textbooks sometimes contained material as unassuming as math problems or stories coated in references to rifles, martyrdom, or battles against kafir, translating to "infidels."
In Pakistan, during that era, madrasas (religious schools) along the Afghan border seemed to proliferate in number and operation, oftentimes directly benefiting from US foreign aid and ideological support. Recipient schools incorporated curricula that merged common religious discourse to blend with militant struggle. One sample excerpt from a textbook reads:

> "Jeem is for Jihad. Jihad is an obligation. My mom went to the jihad. Our brother gave water to the Mujahideen"

Another text stated: "Jihad can mean peaceful struggle as well as holy war … Jihad can be waged … escalating to killing 'infidels.'"

There were also arithmetic problems such as:

> "If there are 5 infidels and 2 are martyred, how many are left to be killed?"

Vocabulary lists included "rifle," "tank," "martyr," "rocket," all framed in normative religious duty. In one example:

> "Though being a student, you cannot practically participate in jihad, but you may provide financial support for jihad."[4]

Illustrations often depicted battles, with narratives about "atheist Russians" invading Muslim lands and defenders rising to protect faith and homeland.

After the Afghan-Soviet war, the term jihadist increasingly entered Western media and political discourse. For example, in a Congressional hearing titled "JIHAD 2.0: Social Media in the Next Evolution of Terrorist Recruitment," the word jihadist appeared dozens of times precisely as a descriptor of various extremist propaganda.[5]

Over time, jihad in Western public media has become practically synonymous with violent Islamic extremism, but this conflation, as demonstrated, obscures the complexity of its concept, origin, and evolution through a process of Western military influence. As a result of the associations of the word with Islamic violence, whether intentionally or not by the U.S. during the Soviet invasion, part of the shift in meaning owes to an ensuing media adoption of the term. Some studies argue that Western media often use jihadist or Islamist imprecisely, reinforcing stereotypes and jihad's ambiguity with its new negative connotation.[6]

But how does this serve the West in particular? Words that seem obscure and unfamiliar to your average family in the United States, when used in an emotionally-charged way creates what acts almost as a heuristic-button, that when pressed signals the feeling that Islam's religious meanings become largely defined by terroristic actions. This becomes self-evident when examining the psychological intuition behind knowing an unfamiliar term, by definition, people don't truly understand the complexity and history behind the term, thus mental short cuts administer fast emotional reactions. Thus if the mere mention of the word is a catalyst towards an existential alarm, at least in theory, ordinary households would be more likely to side with harsh responses or stigmatize whole communities.

Zooming out of a seemingly psychoanalytic theory, empirical work shows that post-9/11 news framing made jihad-related language much more prominent and more narrowly associated with violent actors, mainly by producing disproportionate coverage of attacks by Muslims and strengthening the intuition that the word "Muslim" ought to be followed by "terrorist."[7] What's interesting is this dynamic is amplified online, so whilst the internet was rapidly climbing, terrorist groups such as al-Qaeda, ISIS, and their affiliates deliberately reuse the same vocabulary and visuals to provoke and then benefit from mainstream attention, while publishers, seeking clicks and clarity, opt for the shortest, most associable tag (Jihadist, jihadi, Muslim, etc.) rather than nuance, which further cements the association in public opinion. In several cases that fear-response conditioning helped create the political environment in which large-scale military interventions in Afghanistan and Iraq gained public backing, as media frames such as "radical Islamic terrorism," "Islamist extremism," and the post-9/11"War on Terror" narrative that presented the events normalized the association of the word jihadist to Muslims committing acts of terror."that presented the events normalized the association of Jihadist as a close ally to Muslims committing acts of terror. So, wartime terminology was able to stick better with the government messaging that ensued, increasing the public willingness to support violent intrusions abroad like the Iraq War.

Edward Said's Orientalism offers a lens: Western societies sometimes rely on simplified depictions of the "Other" to reinforce their own narrative frameworks.[8] When religious terms are filtered through distorting assumptions created by our positional desire, their deeper meanings can be easily erased.

If we do not examine how such meanings are constructed, we therefore risk perpetuating cycles of misunderstanding and fear, and before we know it, that fear ends up fueling conflict by treating all Muslims as an inherently violent monolith antithetical to Western civilization.

Especially in an academically rigorous place like Penn, it's important to recognize our deepest moments of learning come from challenging the most basic of assumptions. So why wait for a class (you probably don't have the time to take) to challenge these assumptions for you, when it ought to be in our character to take a second glance at the ones embedded in the words coming out of our mouths everyday. Only through this deliberate introspection can we open space to see the histories and political forces that shaped these terms, and who knows, perhaps future generations will reconsider how foreign policy and public discourse engage with Islam and Muslim communities.

The United States in the Middle East: A Self-Serving History

Caiden Tobias

Introduction

On September 11, 2001, a Muslim fundamentalist group known as Al-Qaeda led an attack on the World Trade Center in New York City.[1] However, American intervention in the Middle East began long before the aftermath of 9/11.

In the 1950s, the United States and the United Kingdom led a coup d'état in Iran to overthrow democratically-elected leadership.[2] During the Gulf War in the 1990s, the United States aided Kuwait in their defense against Saudi Arabia to protect oil interests.[3] That said, I argue that the United States government has acted largely out of self-interest in the Middle East for decades, and this is a persevering legacy.

1953 Coup in Iran and Modern Intervention in Iran

In April of 1951, Mohammad Mosaddegh was democratically elected to be the Prime Minister of Iran by the Iranian people.[4] Most notably, he was responsible for reclaiming control of the country's oil supply from the Anglo-Persian Oil Company. Prior to Iran regaining control of the oil supply, the United States and the United Kingdom used it to cheaply power factories, vehicles, and their respective militaries. Due to rising prices in the aftermath of nationalization, the United States and United Kingdom collaborated to overthrow Mosaddegh to reinstall the shah, Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi. His oil policy was driven by western interests, majorly benefitting the military and economy in both the United States and the United Kingdom. Derived from western oil interests, the American intervention came at the expense of hundreds of lives.[5] The plan, known as Operation Ajax, was approved by then-President Dwight D. Eisenhower and mobilized CIA agents to incite unrest in Iran by harassing religious leaders and leading a disinformation campaign in the media. In all fairness, countries may generally act on behalf of their own interests, especially when engaging in international conflict. However, it is unfair and inaccurate to blame unrest in the Middle East solely on Islamic extremism.

This was only the beginning of modern American intervention in Iran. In June 2025, President Donald Trump bombed three nuclear facilities in Iran based on the idea that they were developing nuclear weapons. The execution received extensive praise from Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.[6] The United States has excused the attacks under the guise of protecting itself from Islamic extremism and the possibility of future terrorism. Yet, this viewpoint overlooks the historical context of the 1953 coup. Blaming Iranian disdain for the west entirely on religious fundamentalism ignores the overthrow of a democratically elected Iranian leader in the 1950s. Imagine a world in which the Iranian government overthrew Donald Trump and installed an emperor, without the consent of the American people. It is incomprehensible to imagine that scenario and expect the American people to hold absolutely zero resentment toward Iran.

September 11, 2001 Attacks and Intervention in Iraq

In the aftermath of the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks, then-President George W. Bush launched the War on Terror, a plan to seek out and combat terrorism around the world.[7] One week after 9/11, Congress passed the Authorization for Use of Military Force (AUMF), which effectively gave the President power to use all necessary force to fight the terrorists that carried out the September 11 attacks.[8] This piece of legislation is one of the most sweeping grants of military authority ever given to the President. Historically, the President had to go through Congress to mobilize the military, but theAUMF allowed him to execute a series of military acts justified by putting an end to terrorism. Under the assumption that Iraq was developing weapons of mass destruction, President Bush deployed the United States military into Iraq using the AUMF.[9] As the war unfolded and casualties rose, many Americans became critical of the Bush administration

for seemingly mishandling the war in Iraq.[10] That is, as Americans saw photographs of United States soldiers abusing Iraqis, disapproval rates rose.

The Iraq War proved that both fear and nationalism could be weaponized to justify intervention. Moreover, the AUMF equipped the United States government with the authority to arrest anyone who fought against the United States in wartime. In 2001, an American citizen, Yaser Hamdi, was detained by the United States military in Afghanistan and declared an enemy combatant.[11] In Hamdi v. Rumsfeld (2004), the Supreme Court held that the Fifth Amendment Due Process Clause guarantees any citizen held in the United States as an enemy combatant the right to dispute their detention.[12] The United States government tried to justify his detention by simply claiming he was operating against military forces. Even still, the Court agreed that his "enemy combatant" status was not a sufficient justification to deny his right to due process.

The September 11 terrorist attacks undoubtedly created a sense of fear in both the American public and the United States government, and the AUMF served as the driving force behind a mission to end terrorism across the globe.

Modern American Intervention in the Middle East

Today, the United States continues to intervene in the Middle East, and now, the Middle East is returning the favor. Recently, the Department of Defense announced that Qatar will soon build a new air force facility in Idaho.[13] Though it will be subject to United States jurisdiction, it is important to note that no foreign country currently has an air base in the United States.

As it stands, the genocide in Gaza has come to a pause. President Trump recently brokered a shaky ceasefire between Israel and Gaza.[14] Since then, the Israeli government has killed dozens of Palestinians, and only time will tell if the truce will hold.

The United States government has been involved in Middle Eastern affairs for decades, and the legacy is one cloaked in self-interest. United States actions have deepened Middle Eastern resentment toward the West. Until the United States government and the American people acknowledge the effects of history, the United States will continue engaging in self-interested actions under the guise of pursuing peace.

Milei's Pragmatic Term

Carolina Rassi Constantini

The Promise of Rupture

Javier Milei, an economist and self-described political outsider, won the 2023 Argentine presidential election with the promise of an ideological rupture from past policy. A large part of this promise pertained to his refusal to "promote any relation with communists," particularly Argentina's two largest historic export partners: Brazil and China. As of 2022, those countries accounted for around 23 percent of Argentina's exports—14 percent to Brazil and 9 percent to China—which raised the question of whether his campaign's vision was realistically possible.[1]

Self-proclaimed "anarcho-capitalist," Milei has claimed to follow the intellectual lineage of the Austrian school of economics.[2] In practice, this represents a belief that political leadership should be characterized by skepticism regarding any government intervention, discretionary monetary policy, and the abolition of the Central Bank, among other elements. He cast himself as a libertarian crusader fighting against the "socialist decay" of Latin America, envisioning Argentina as a closer ally to the US and Israel and more distanced from China and Brazil: China is a state capitalist model defined by centralized planning by the Chinese Communist Party, with subsidies and strategic control, and Brazil relies on strong public institutions, industrial policies, and an active development bank (BNDS)—both countries are antitheses of what Milei claims his ideology to be. In this sense, his views on domestic policy affect his foreign policy, and this manifests itself through his expressed goal of distancing Argentina from all countries "that do not respect the ideas of freedom."[3]

Milei criticised Mercosur, the regional trading bloc linking Argentina with Brazil, Paraguay, and Uruguay, arguing that it hindered "the promotion of free trade between nations to advance the general well-being of Argentines."[4] Prior to the election, the BRICS group—an economic and political alliance of Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa that seeks to promote a multipolar world order—had extended a membership invitation to Argentina. Milei used this as further proof of what he called the country's misguided alignment with "autocracies," claiming Argentina must focus on relations with liberal democracies instead.

Milei's foreign policy promise is a deliberate reversal of Argentina's previous diplomatic course. In the years leading up to his election, Buenos Aires deepened ties with the so-called Global South, strengthening relations with China, Russia, and Iran and maintaining Brazil as its largest trading partner.[5] Chinese investment in particular expanded rapidly, as China grew from a virtually irrelevant trading partner in the early 2000s to the second largest trading partner after Brazil by 2023.[6]

Prior to Milei, the Fernández administration celebrated increasing globalization as a sign of Argentinian prominence in the international trade market, approximating international liberalism through interdependence with major powers as routes to growth. Milei, on the other hand, criticized this as purely ideological alignment with communists, which he promised to reverse if elected. He framed this trajectory as dangerous and advanced a form of economic nativism in which Argentina should limit its closest economic partnership to a narrow club of ideologically like-minded states while casting others as threats to the nation's sovereignty.

In the Casa Rosada

When Milei entered the Casa Rosada in December 2023, he inherited an economy deep in recession, accompanied by triple-digit inflation and dependency on diplomatic relations with Brazil and China—two countries he had repeatedly condemned. The rupture he imagined during the campaign now had to coexist with the arithmetic of governance; to sever relations with China and Brazil was completely unrealistic for Argentina. Milei had to engage with both Brazilian president Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva—

the man he had labeled a "corrupt communist" and "an idiotic dinosaur"—and with Beijing, whose regime he had described as a murderous dictatorship.[7] The question was no longer whether he would break from the past, but how far he could afford to go without breaking the country itself.

In his first months in office, Milei's foreign policy revealed its pragmatism in practice. His administration renewed part of the $18 billion currency swap with China, an arrangement that allows Argentina's central bank to borrow Chinese yuan in exchange for pesos and gives Buenos Aires access to foreign reserves when dollars run short. He had previously criticized the currency swap as evidence of Argentina's submission to Beijing, but as acting president, he was forced to acknowledge that the country's reserves largely depended on it. Additionally, trade with China continued without disruption as the rhetoric of rupture softened into "mutual respect."[8] Foreign Minister Diana Mondino insisted that ideological differences would not prevent cooperation in "areas of shared economic interest."[9]

The same pattern emerged with Brazil. Though Milei refused to meet President Lula personally in July 2024, skipping the Mercosur summit where the presidents would have met, his economy minister maintained regular contact with Brazilian counterparts to preserve trade in the automotive and energy sectors. His administration didn't abandon trade agreements or withdraw from Mercosur institutional mechanisms, and Brazil's ambassador in Argentina, Julio Bitelli, has stated that the presidents' differences have had "minimal effect" on the operational aspects of trade.[10]

It is also true, however, that where the economic costs were lower, Milei's administration did prioritize alignment with liberal democracies. Argentina formally declined to join BRICS in December 2023 and strengthened ties with Israel and the US. Milei was the first foreign leader to meet with US President Donald Trump following his election in 2024, and in multilateral forums, Argentine representatives have demonstrated a pattern of consistently voting with Western democracies. The result has been a dual-track diplomacy. While Milei ideologically condemns these transactional relationships, he maintains them for the sake of pragmatism.

The Fruits of Milei's Political Alignment

Argentina's financial situation is far from comfortable, and volatility has only increased in recent months. In October 2025, US Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent praised Argentina's fiscal policy and announced on X that the US had begun directly purchasing Argentine pesos in the foreign exchange market. Bessent described the intervention as part of a "whatever-it-takes" effort to stabilize Argentina's exchange rate, also confirming the signing of a $20 billion currency-swap framework between the US Treasury and Argentina's central bank. American support was especially welcomed by Milei's administration given their resounding defeat in recent local elections to the Peronists—a backlash largely driven by his struggling economic record. This unprecedented form of economic backing immediately sent local bank stocks soaring and erased short-term fears of devaluation for Argentina, boosting the president's credibility.

For President Milei, this backing from Washington is evidence that his efforts to bring Argentina closer in ideology to liberal democracies like the US has a tangible positive impact. Under Milei, the country has endured one of the harshest fiscal adjustments in decades, yet emerged with falling inflation, a recovering peso, and impressive growth projections. Inflation plunged from over 200% in 2023 to an expected 35% in 2025, GDP is set to expand by more than 5%, and (after a temporary rise) unemployment shows signs of decline.[11]

While Argentina is still faced with ambiguous diplomatic relationships, an unstable political environment, and significant dependence on international financial markets, for the first time in this century, it seems that the country could be facing a feasible challenge.

Pharmacy Benefit Managers: The Culprit Behind America's Soaring Drug Prices

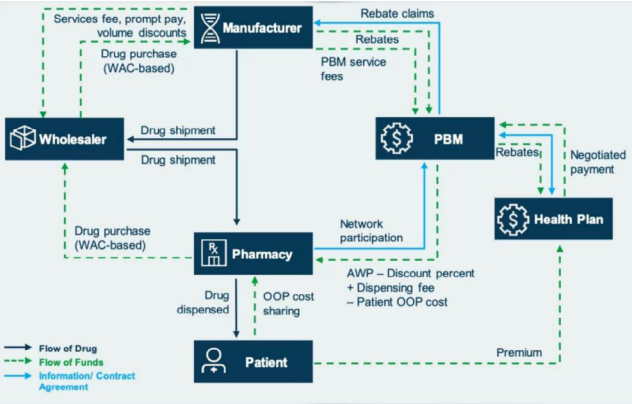
Wesley Liu

Few issues spark as much shared outrage as the soaring cost of prescription medications. From insulin to chemotherapy pills, medication costs in the United States routinely outpaces that of comparable high-income countries.[1] For years, Congress has directed its frustration toward pharmaceutical manufacturers. Yet, a less visible actor—the pharmacy benefit manager (PBM)—has quietly shaped what patients ultimately pay for prescriptions.

PBMs claim to lower costs through negotiations with drugmakers, insurers, and pharmacies. In reality, many experts believe they have become both a symptom and a cause of America's pharmaceutical price crisis. Understanding how PBMs operate—and how their incentives might be restructured—offers one of the clearest pathways toward meaningful reform.

What PBMs Actually Do

Pharmacy benefit managers are companies that first emerged in the 1960s serving as administrative intermediaries initially processing drug claims for insurers, and constituting only a small part of health insurance operations.



PBMs negotiate drug prices and manage pharmacy benefits between insurers and pharmacies.

However, as prescription drugs became a larger component of healthcare costs, PBMs evolved into powerful negotiators, determining at what prices pharmacies are reimbursed, and which medications appear on insurance formularies—or which medications are covered on health plans. Today, three companies—CVS Caremark, Express Scripts, and OptumRx—control about 80 percent of the market.[2] Their reach gives them tremendous leverage to extract rebates from manufacturers in exchange for favorable formulary placement.

Those rebates should go directly to patients for lower premiums and copays. Yet PBMs often retain a portion of the rebate as revenue or link their own compensation to the manufacturer's list price, creating an incentive to prefer higher-priced drugs that generate larger rebates. In essence, this washes out any positive effect of the rebates with an even greater price increase.[3] A Health Affairs Scholar analysis describes this misalignment as a "perverse feedback loop" that pushes list prices higher while disguising the true net price through confidential rebate contracts.[4]

Consolidation and Vertical Integration

PBMs also control pharmacies directly. CVS Health owns both a PBM and a nationwide pharmacy chain, while UnitedHealth Group owns OptumRx alongside OptumCare clinics. Such vertical integration blurs the line between negotiator and provider, raising concerns about preferential pricing and steering patients toward affiliated pharmacies.

A 2025 JAMA Health Forum study found that insurer-owned PBMs consistently directed patients to company-owned pharmacies, limiting consumer choice and reducing independent pharmacies' market share.[5] Critics argue that anti-steering rules and stronger Federal Trade Commission oversight are necessary to prevent conflicts of interest, while supporters counter that integration allows for coordinated care and lower administrative costs. Both perspectives highlight the delicate balance between efficiency and competition.

The Regulatory Catch-Up

For decades, PBMs operated with little oversight. Their contracts with insurers and pharmacies often allowed them to reimburse pharmacies less than what they charge health plans and pocket the difference—a phenomenon known as "spread pricing."[6] Until recently, states had little visibility into these arrangements. Now, over forty states require PBMs to be licensed or registered, and several have banned spread pricing altogether.[7] However, enforcement remains uneven, and no national framework standardizes disclosure.

At the federal level, the Senate Finance Committee and House Oversight Committee have advanced bipartisan bills that would mandate rebate transparency and prohibit retroactive pharmacy clawbacks.[8] Yet Congress remains divided over how much transparency is too much. PBMs argue that exposing proprietary pricing data would weaken their ability to negotiate with drugmakers. Consumer

advocates respond that opacity has enabled rent-seeking and market distortions for decades.

The Transparency Debate

Transparency has become the rhetorical centerpiece of PBM reform—but the practical details matter. Some proposals would require PBMs to publicly disclose all rebate amounts. Others recommend reporting aggregate data confidentially to regulators to maintain negotiating leverage.

A Journal of Managed Care & Specialty Pharmacy commentary notes that "targeted transparency"—rather than total disclosure—may be most effective.[9] Providing aggregate data on rebate retention and net drug costs could allow regulators to monitor market fairness without triggering antitrust complications or undermining price negotiations. Meanwhile, economists warn that transparency alone cannot fix a structurally misaligned system.

Unintended Consequences of Reform

Even with transparency though, the devil is in the details in determining whether patients actually benefit. Eliminating rebate-based compensation could destabilize insurers that rely on those funds to offset premiums. Replacing rebates with flat administrative fees would simplify pricing but might dampen PBMs' motivation to negotiate steep discounts.[10]

Another proposal is to ban spread pricing. While this would improve fairness for community pharmacies, it could push PBMs to tighten networks, exclude smaller providers, or raise administrative fees elsewhere. Some independent pharmacies fear that well-intentioned reforms could paradoxically accelerate their closures by consolidating the market further under the largest players.

The experience of Medicare Part D offers a cautionary tale. Between 2011 and 2020, the program's reliance on utilization management—prior authorization and step therapy—grew dramatically.[11] These tools saved money but delayed access for many patients with chronic conditions. Reforming PBMs without reproducing such barriers requires nuanced policy design rather than sweeping bans.

Policy Options Moving Forward

Policymakers and scholars have converged on three major proposals: (1) Delink PBM profits from list prices by paying fixed administrative fees; (2) Standardize oversight through federal regulation; and (3) Encourage competition and innovation by supporting transparent formularies and generic substitution.

Some experts have also suggested requiring PBMs to pass rebates directly to patients at the point of sale, effectively lowering out-of-pocket costs. While insurers worry this could raise premiums, evidence from pilot programs suggests a modest impact relative to the benefits for high-deductible-plan enrollees.

Policy Recommendation: A Federal Delinking and Pass-Through Framework

While incremental measures have dominated recent debates, the long-term solution lies in a federal delinking and pass-through framework—a unified model that would restructure how PBMs are paid, standardize disclosure, and guarantee that negotiated savings directly benefit patients.

1. Delinking PBM revenue from list prices.
The federal government should prohibit compensation models tied to a drug's sticker price. Instead, PBMs would receive flat service fees or performance-based payments contingent on demonstrated savings, patient adherence, and formulary efficiency.[12] This model mirrors reforms implemented in the Netherlands and Germany, where intermediaries are paid for value rather than volume.

2. Mandating point-of-sale rebate pass-throughs.
Manufacturers and PBMs would be required to pass a substantial portion—at least 85 percent—of negotiated rebates directly to consumers at the counter.[13] Patients with chronic conditions or high-deductible plans would see immediate price reductions, while insurers could offset lost rebate revenue through tax-neutral credits or reinsurance subsidies.

3. Strengthening pharmacy competition.
To preserve independent and rural pharmacies, Congress could offer fair-reimbursement guarantees for dispensing essential generics and prohibit exclusive steering to vertically integrated chains. This would ensure that PBM cost controls do not inadvertently eliminate local access points, especially in medically underserved areas.[14]

Together, these policies would realign incentives throughout the drug supply chain. By replacing opaque rebate games with measurable service outcomes, a delinking framework could reduce systemic costs while protecting patient access and market diversity.

Conclusion: Realigning the System

PBMs were created to make a fragmented healthcare system more efficient. Over time, they became emblematic of that system's dysfunction. But eliminating them entirely would likely raise costs further; the task ahead is not to destroy the middleman, but to make the middleman work for us. A delinked, transparent, and accountable PBM structure could realign incentives toward value rather than volume. As economist Ge Bai observes, "When efficiency replaces opacity, savings follow naturally."[12] If successful, PBM reform could mark a turning point in American healthcare—one where the savings negotiated in boardrooms finally reach the patients standing at the pharmacy counter.

Exclusionary Frameworks: How AI Governance is Crowding Out Global Perspectives

Naija Agarwal

Between the rush for artificial intelligence development and the formation of AI ethics and governance initiatives, a pro-Western narrative has assumed center stage in the global conversation. Since the United Nations Security Council's pre-debate on September 24, 2025,[1] discourse surrounding AI's implications has underscored an urgency for international cooperation to prioritize global security against technology. The UN has significantly escalated its efforts to develop a comprehensive global framework to advance AI governance, establishing concrete systems of principles and practices to guide the creation, deployment, and management of AI systems. These systems draw on values of fairness, accountability, and ethicality, regardless of the nation in which they are utilized. Yet, in the rush to harness AI's developmental potential and propose a shared governance framework, there has been an exclusionary effect affecting certain global perspectives.

As many countries are pursuing governance frameworks to hone AI in healthcare, the economy, and the military, there is a window of opportunity to align efforts and ensure the safeguarding of developers and users of AI. By excluding regionally informed perspectives, the West is contributing to a fragile system built on unilateral beliefs and actions that are disposed against non-Western perspectives.

The Sphere of AI Governance

Countless streams of influence allow Western views to permeate the AI governance space, producing AI systems built on bias.[2] The University of Witwatersrand Johannesburg studied the extent to which AI bias prioritizes Western audiences over their global compatriots, through explainable AI or XAI systems.

XAI systems allow AI engineers to monitor and correct processing, leading to informed decisions about guiding AI outputs and training responses. Through analyzing a decade of studies on XAI systems and their justifications for outputs, it was found that systems tailor responses towards individualist, Western populations. Moreover, 93.7% of the studies reviewed indicated an unawareness of cultural variations in designing explainable AI, highlighting the imbalance of samples drawn from Western populations versus non-Western populations.[3]

Despite the leading role the U.S. maintains in global AI governance, its lack of domestic policies regarding AI reflects an absence of critical infrastructure supporting its international influence and power, seen notably in the lack of a digital bill of rights. Other countries and regions have already begun to establish protections for individuals and their data privacy, rooted in civil liberties and digital rights.

Brazil enacted the Marco Civil da Internet, or Marco Civil Law of the Internet, in 2014.[4] Despite its heavily debated implementation, the legislation aimed to translate principles of the Brazilian Constitution to online spaces.[5] This highlights the importance of leveraging constitutional rights to safeguard personal information and data through international governance.

The EU's Declaration on Digital Rights and Principles similarly provides an outline for advancing technology while remaining mindful of ethical values. Without clear domestic strategies to address governance challenges in the United States, a combination of global perspectives can support a sustainable foundation for ethical AI development and use.

Reframing AI Governance Around Cultural and Philosophical Traditions

Culture is often treated as a secondary consideration in the development of AI governance, yet its potential cannot be overstated. Differing cultural perspectives provide a unique foundation for ethical considerations, refuting a "one-size-fits-all" approach.[6] Hundreds of varying philosophies and cultures are ingrained in global societies, offering a means to unify AI governance with social and ethical intentions.

For example, the African philosophy of Ubuntu prioritizes harmonious relationships among individuals and communities as an underlying value for innovation. It values the collective over the individual, contrasting the Western individualistic values. The concept is reflected in the Linux-based operating system, which has promoted community convergence and sharing since its creation in 2004.[7] By highlighting interdependence between human beings, Ubuntu advocates for the common good and social alignment to enact positive change. Applying Ubuntu to AI governance has the potential to rein in the competitive nature of the race towards advancement, focusing on community in future decisions and initiatives.

While Ubuntu is centered on community-minded action, Chinese philosophy proposes to shape AI governance through values centered on balance and humility. This perspective is found in pillars of China's religious identity, such as Daoism and Confucianism. They offer particular value systems that have influenced China's own approach to technology innovation and regulation.

Daoism holds a principle of wu wei, often translated as "non-action." It is not a denial of action; rather, it advocates the refusal of coercive action. It values the outcome over the process.[8] A Daoist approach would reject introducing force into innovation through overregulation. Alternatively, it would encourage adaptivity in frameworks to allow technology to grow without being burdened by inflexible standards.

China has announced national guidelines to integrate smart cities that use advanced technology to improve urban management by 2027. In this case, Daoist principles would argue against centralized control, encouraging flexibility from governments and corporations and making them adaptable to local circumstances and residents.

Through Confucianism, the philosophy views technology separately from nature and claims it must reinforce ethical conduct. Similar to Ubuntu, it serves a community over individualistic priorities. To apply this ethical foundation to AI governance, Confucianism supports integrating responsibility, accountability, and fairness with a focus on community input. For example, its argument towards the use of AI in education emphasizes a moral duty for technology to support educators. It argues that replacing them would pose a direct threat to the nature of education by replacing "core human roles"[9] with ill-suited technology.

The Future of AI Governance

Reflecting on these examples does not fully capture the diversity of ideas offered by global cultural and philosophical perspectives. While the U.S. has stepped forward in the development of a global framework for AI governance, the expansion of pro-Western bias eclipses perspectives of the rest of the world. To maximize this window of opportunity to create sustainable AI governance frameworks, a critical shift must address the bias introduced by the West and equally weigh the perspectives offered by other countries, building a guaranteed path towards a flexible, applicable, and pluralistic system.

Atomic Inequality and Nuclear Roots of Modern Conflict: How Nuclear Hypocrisy Shapes Today's Middle East

Vasanna Persaud

Paradox of Power

Commonly known as the world's most unstable region, the Middle East has achieved neither peace nor parity. Since the Cold War, nuclear weaponry has directly moulded the region's political hierarchy. While these nations all experimented with nuclear programs, their results and international reactions were vastly different. This paradox introduced a new level to existing global inequalities and continues to shape the rivalries and instabilities in today's Middle East. An analysis of their history reveals an underlying hypocrisy: nuclear protection is granted by geopolitics, not by principle.

More Similar Than We Realise

The fear of exclusion — of being the minority, the subjugated, the oppressed — drives many to the extreme in hopes of creating their own acceptance. Religion is often humanity's greatest source of this divide, and in the 20th century, conflicts emerged from seemingly irreconcilable differences through one's respective prayers. Therefore, across the globe, leaders capitalised on this religious divide and created a solid post-colonial foundation in the birth of religiously centred nations. Pakistan and Israel were founded as religious homelands for Islam and Judaism, respectively. Following the 1979 revolution, Iran followed the religious train and became an Islamic Republic. All three states resulted from various ideological movements as well — Zionism for Israel, the Islamic Revolution for Iran, and the Pakistan Movement for Pakistan. Each was successful in using a shared identity to push for a new state or governance. These nations are also relatively new, with Pakistan's borders drawn in 1947, Israel's British borders in 1948, and the Islamic Republic of Iran in 1979.

At the turn of the 1980s, there were three relatively new nations that were neighbours, adamant to make their mark on the global scale in a way that solidified their nationalism through intensified security. And, what better way than to hold the power of atomic destruction?

The Origins of the Bomb

"Now I am become death, the destroyer of worlds," was the famous line J. Robert Oppenheimer recalled as he witnessed his life's work come into fruition with the first successful detonation of a nuclear weapon. Oppenheimer, who was an American theoretical physicist often called the "father of the atomic bomb," developed the atomic bomb by creating a chain reaction using nuclear fission. This led to the detonation of the first atomic bomb in 1945 during the Trinity Test. Just three weeks later, the United States bombed Hiroshima and Nagasaki. After the bombs, the renowned physicist felt immense regret in a meeting with President Harry S. Truman, saying, "I feel like I have blood on my hands." He was accurate in describing his creation as the force capable of destroying worlds, as the atomic bomb debuted as the new global hierarchy where absence meant vulnerability, and one particular region– the Middle East– took notice.

Israel

Nowhere did the fear of landing low on this hierarchy resonate so deeply and quickly as with Israel. After their defeat during the Suez Crisis for their secret and unprovoked invasion of Egypt, Israel chose its next move in the form of nuclear escalation. Driven by the memory of the Holocaust, alleged threats from Arab neighbours, and Western backing for a democratic nation in the Middle East, the Israel Atomic Energy Commission began its nuclear journey. The French provided Israel with a large nuclear reactor and processing plant in a deal born from their collusion in the Suez Crisis. The Negev Nuclear Research Centre began construction in secret in 1958 and became operational four years later. Despite the assembly of the first nuclear weapons in 1966, its closest ally, the United States, was only able to confirm that Israel possessed a nuclear weapon by 1973.

Even its confirmation was uncertain with the "Vela Incident," an unclear double-flash of light which many intelligence experts believe to be a joint Israeli-South African nuclear test.[1] Ultimately, this Jewish homeland saw nuclear weapons as the ultimate guarantor of its survival.

Pakistan

To the east, another nation was defining itself by the day with this paranoia and fear. In 1940, in Lahore, British India, soon to be Pakistan's first prime minister, Muhammad Ali Jinnah, laid out the two-nation theory, stating that Hindus and Muslims were two distinct entities and could not exist together in an independent India. After independence, India's first prime minister, Jawaharlal

Nehru, recognized the power that nuclear capability could give to India as a civilizational renewal. He supported the development primarily for economic development and national security. With assistance from the U.S. and motivated by China's nuclear test in 1964, India detonated 'Smiling Buddha' in 1974.[2]

While a scientific feat for India, this milestone had a profound impact on Pakistan, driving it to develop its own nuclear arsenal. To say Pakistan felt threatened by India's nuclear test was an understatement. As Pakistan Prime Minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto stated in his speech as a reaction to the test, "We will eat grass, even go hungry, but we will get one of our own…We have no other choice!" With new blueprints, Chinese assistance, and motivation from India's nuclear program, Pakistan publicly tested its nuclear weapons in 1998. As Bhutto promised, Pakistanis "ate grass" to match their neighbours, ready to defend against the slightest show of aggression from India. The already unstable border between the two nations was exacerbated in a costly arms race[3] and resulted in continued tension in the now nuclear-armed neighbours.

Iran

Similar to Pakistan, Iran's nuclear weapons development began under the U.S. Atomic Weapons for Peace Program. However, after the Islamic Revolution, it became ambitious with the new clerical regime believing atomic capability as the ultimate protector against the U.S. and Israel.[4]

Iran received such intense global hostility after its revolution that it became isolated. The nation that despised vulnerability was further intensified by Iraq's chemical weapons use during the Iraq-Iran war and the growing strength of rival Saudi Arabia.[5] Pakistani scientist Abdul Khan ran a black market nuclear network during the 1990s, selling information and equipment to Iran, Libya, and North Korea. It is here that Iran acquired crucial technology and centrifuge designs and began its secret production facilities, assisted by Russia and China, which were later revealed by an opposition group in 2002. This exposure resulted in Project Amad's (the Iranian nuclear weapons development program) dissolution, and the efforts ended without Iran acquiring the necessary fissile material. In each nation, the development of nuclear weapons rose from feelings of fear and isolation, not aggression. These nations all believed they were imminently threatened and must secure the highest level of protection the new world order offered. Additionally, they all had assistance from different global powers that were protecting their own interests. Nuclear developments created this strategic triangle of tension born from nations seeking sovereignty in a world of intervention.

A Silent Power: The Protected-Israel

It has been several decades since Israel passed the nuclear weapons threshold. Yet, compared to the other seven nuclear nations, they have never publicly acknowledged their nuclear weapons program. This silence is not coincidental; rather, Israel's silence has always been strategic. The nation refers to its nuclear policy as 'aminut' (Hebrew for further opacity). Since 1960, when U.S. intelligence confirmed the Dimonia reactor, it has protected its nuclear arsenal. Israel's western allies chose intentional silence, turning a blind eye, and the nation has received no sanctions, condemnations, or nuclear weapons inspections in its entire history.

In 1963, President John F. Kennedy sent a letter asking for transparency, and the Israelis deflected by stating that Dimona was simply for research. By the Nixon administration, the U.S. shifted from curiosity to cooperation, despite Israel's refusal to sign the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty.

This "responsible democracy" has utilised silence to show the first aspect of atomic inequality — he who builds the bomb matters more than the bomb itself. Israel's western alignment has prevented the conventional scrutiny that comes from nuclear capability. The global order's acceptance of Israel's opacity brings to light the inconsistency of nuclear politics.

A Geopolitical Ally: The Tolerated Pakistan

Pakistan falls in the middle of the spectrum of reactions to a nation developing a nuclear weapon. It began with condemnation and sanctions, with the U.S. cutting off military aid in 1958. However, post-9/11, Pakistan emerged

as an ally for the U.S. against the Taliban. This solidified the nation as a major non-NATO ally, with the U.S. lifting sanctions and a reluctant acceptance of its nuclear program.

It is important to note that the U.S. and the broader West never trusted Pakistan; they tolerated them. Pakistan and the United States had a transactional nature of an alliance. During the Cold War, Pakistan was an ally as a bulwark against the Soviet Union and an essential partner during the War on Terror. In these instances, cooperation was a means to an end, never to be mistaken as a sign of strategic trust. This relationship was also unstable, with periods of rapid disengagement and sanctions once the U.S. met its objectives, as seen in the U.S. withdrawal of aid in the 1990s after the Soviet Union left Afghanistan.[6]

This proved that permission can be conditional when geopolitically convenient.

A Nuclear Scapegoat: The Punished Iran
Even if we ignore the negative rhetoric an Islamic nation receives, especially one that's anti-Western, the reactions against Iran's nuclear development seem almost extreme. Their nuclear ambitions grew out of fear similar to that of Israel and Pakistan's, yet were matched with international resistance. This is ironic as the nation's atomic program was U.S.-blessed[7] through President Eisenhower's Atoms for Peace Program, but after the Islamic Revolution, global attitudes flipped. Iran was no longer progressing towards nuclear capability but rather towards weapons ambition. In the 1990s-2000s, the U.S. and EU enforced sanctions without proof of weapons[8] and in 2010, a joint U.S.-Israeli operation sabotaged the nation's centrifuges.[9] Despite never finishing its nuclear weapon, Iran has faced economic warfare, covert sabotage, and international hostility.

Iran's treatment reveals the punishment of defiance — of refusing to subscribe to the world order — in atomic hierarchy. The nuclear legitimacy was a formality for control.

Three Nations, Three Fates

As time has shown, fear may have driven nuclear protection, but allegiance was the true test of judgment. This glaring bias speaks to the atomic hierarchy, citing atomic inequality, not proliferation, as the Middle East's true source of instability. Israel was protected as it shielded a Jewish state and as a Western ally in the region, supported by U.S. foreign intelligence.[10] Pakistan's nuclear programs were largely tolerated due to their geopolitical utility during the Cold War and in the post 9/11 environment.[11] On the other hand, Iran faced sanctions, global isolation and military threats for disrupting the prevailing world order. Together, these three cases form the atomic hierarchy, showing us that survival and protection are privileges that are ultimately political rather than rights.

The bomb may not have destroyed our world yet, but it has divided us to limits unimaginable.

Why Europe Cannot Afford to Play Fair Alone: The Crisis of Multilateralism And Its Consequences For The EU

Ferenc Brezo

Introduction

A century ago, European powers dominated global affairs. Today, that influence has markedly diminished, a decline hastened by the 2008 financial crisis and deepened by ongoing geopolitical and economic shifts. The European Union, once envisioned as a unified bloc capable of projecting both economic and normative power, now struggles with waning leverage, internal divisions, and a lack of military credibility. As multilateralism falters and great power competition intensifies, the EU can no longer afford to approach global politics with naïve idealism. This essay argues that Europe must adopt a more assertive and strategic posture, leveraging its remaining strengths to secure its interests and maintain its relevance on the world stage.

The History of the European Project

Following the devastating years of World War II, Western European countries undertook a new, collective project aimed at economically and politically uniting the continent, from which the European Union was born. Setting aside their previously nationalist and protectionist agendas, they followed in suit with the United States, pursuing open societies, multilateral diplomacy, and deeper integration into the world's trading system. Their military, supported by the U.S.'s nuclear umbrella, was prepared to defend their countries against the Soviet threat, not to assert global influence, as exemplified by the Suez Strait Crisis. This was an era of rapid population and economic growth, marked by harmony on the Western side of Europe.

After the fall of the Soviet Union, the triumph of the Western world order - liberal democracy, multilateral diplomacy, and free-trade capitalism - seemed almost inevitable. Europe entered a new golden age with the reunification of the two sides of the Iron Curtain. For the first few years, the process went according to plan, and several Eastern European countries joined the EU, thereby enlarging economic prosperity. The voice of the EU's institutions was growing stronger each year, and some of its member states defied America for the first time since 1945 by signaling their opposition to the War in Iraq. A new constitution was drafted, and the bloc became increasingly unified, engaging in strategic diplomacy that included negotiating a ceasefire in the Russo-Georgian War, pacifying the Balkans, and developing the first joint military strategy.

However, the situation quickly shifted after the financial crisis of 2008, plunging the EU into a wave of chaos: rejection of the EU constitution by some member states, the Eurozone crisis, the annexation of Crimea by Russia, the War in Donbas, the migrant crisis, COVID, the trade war with the U.S., and the Russian Invasion of Ukraine. In this period of approximately 15 years, the continent's economic proportion from the world GDP has significantly declined, leaving less resources and political capital for geopolitical endeavors, leading to a situation where it has conceded to uneven trade terms with the U.S., has struggled to manage sustained migratory pressures from surrounding regions, its adversaries are interfering into

internal affairs by using member states, while it has not been able to deter Russia from waging a hybrid war on Europe's Eastern borders. Nevertheless, given the economic and military development of the bloc, combined with highly functional government services and a large, even though aging population, I still believe that if the European Union used more efficient policy measures leveraging its military, economic, and soft strength, its decline could be turned around and its position stabilized.

Foreign Economic Policy: From Dependence To Sovereignty

If the European Union wants to maximize its economic gains in an increasingly competitive world, it must stop treating its economy as a passive beneficiary of globalization and start using its complete set of tools with strategic intent. Chief among these is the Single Market, one of the world's most valuable economic spaces, which should be leveraged not just as a zone of internal prosperity, but as a powerful geopolitical asset. Access to it can and should be conditioned on reciprocal benefits, allowing the EU to negotiate from a position of strength in trade deals, supply chain agreements, and investment relationships.

To be effective, this strategy requires a more unified and coordinated economic approach across member states. Instead of fragmented national industrial policies, the EU needs a unified subsidization strategy, designed to compete with major global players such as the United States and China. This means dividing strategic tasks among member states - whether in semiconductors, green tech, or medical production - to create a coherent and resilient European industrial base. Fragmentation only weakens the bloc's ability to scale and innovate.

Reducing external dependencies is also about leverage. By minimizing reliance on volatile or coercive partners for energy, critical raw materials, and digital infrastructure, the EU gains greater freedom to pursue its interests without economic vulnerability. Expanding the international use of the euro and strengthening joint financial instruments would also reduce exposure to extraterritorial pressures tied to the U.S. dollar.

In short, Europe's path to greater prosperity and strategic relevance lies in thinking and acting like an economic power, not just a trade bloc. That means coordinating internally to compete externally, using its collective weight to shape global outcomes rather than being shaped by them.

The EU's Needed Security Shift

For decades, the European Union has relied on U.S. protection through NATO. That arrangement once seemed stable, until American politics began shifting and leaders, such as President Trump, openly questioned whether the U.S. would come to Europe's defense. The war in Ukraine has only made one thing clear: Europe needs the ability to defend itself.

A unified European military would do more than enhance security. It would eliminate wasteful duplication between national armies, improve coordination, and strengthen Europe's voice in global affairs. In 2025 alone, EU countries spent over €381 billion on defense[1], yet that investment is spread across 27 different systems. Shared procurement and joint capability planning could enable Europe to allocate resources more efficiently, spending less on unnecessary overlaps and more on core capabilities, while purchasing at a larger scale to lower unit costs.

To support a real joint force, Europe also needs to produce its own weapons. Relying on American or third-country suppliers is a vulnerability. That is why Commission President von der Leyen's European Readiness2030[2] imitative is important: it aims to scale up domestic production and consolidate defense industries across the bloc. A European military-industrial base must back a European army.

Of course, political resistance remains. Many states, with varying degrees of sovereignty, are skeptical of ceding military control to Brussels. Sovereigntist parties will almost certainly oppose any proposal for a centralized command.

However, Russia's actions may be changing the calculus. From its invasion of Ukraine to repeated airspace violations, Moscow has made the threat tangible. For the first time in decades, European leaders have a clear political justification for pushing for deeper defense integration.

Building a unified army will not be easy, but doing nothing would be riskier. The EU does not just need more defense spending, but a defense strategy worthy of a continent that wants to protect itself.

A New Tone in Diplomacy

For the European Union to become a serious geopolitical actor, it must abandon its longstanding reliance on multilateral idealism and embrace a more interest-driven, realist approach to foreign policy. The world's major powers do not operate through endless consensus-building or moral appeals; they pursue their interests strategically, using a combination of soft and hard power. If Europe wants to defend its values and influence in this harsher international environment, it must do the same.

Nevertheless, realism requires coherence. A foreign policy that serves European interests can only function if it is unified, decisive, and efficiently executed. That is impossible under the EU's current fragmented structure. To change this, foreign policy coordination must be centralized within the European Commission. A unified diplomatic voice would enhance credibility abroad, enable faster responses to crises, and give smaller member

states more influence than they can achieve individually. Countries like Estonia or Malta, often sidelined on the global stage, would benefit from the weight of collective representation.

At the same time, the political gridlock within the European Council must be addressed. While the principle of consensus has long been foundational to EU decision-making, it often leads to paralysis in foreign affairs. Strategic interests cannot be served if internal disagreements indefinitely delay critical actions. Reforming decision-making mechanisms - through opt-outs, qualified majorities, or other flexible models - is essential to ensure that Europe can act when it must, without permanently sidelining dissenting voices.

Europe's soft power has long rested on its ability to act as a principled and persuasive global voice. However, fragmented voices dilute impact; a single, coordinated position amplifies it. By unifying its external action under the European Commission and overcoming internal veto politics, the EU would not only speak more clearly, but it would also become more effective. In doing so, it could renew its soft power as a strategic asset rather than a symbolic one.

Is It All Feasible?

Skeptics may argue that the level of ambition outlined here is politically unrealistic, especially given the EU's recent struggles with deep reform. They point to the challenge of creating a unified military from 27 national armies, as well as shifting the European Commission's priorities from bureaucratic management toward strategic statecraft. Some may even believe that Europe's window for meaningful reform has already closed and that the future will be defined by gradual economic, military, and political decline.

However, such pessimism underestimates the transformative potential of the European project. After the devastation of World War II, few imagined that Germany and Poland could become allies, or that a continent once divided by war could create a shared currency and a supranational Commission. All of these milestones were considered politically impossible until they became a reality.

History is full of unexpected turns. In the late 20th century, China was among the world's poorest nations. Today, it rivals the United States. India, a civilization that boasts a vast diversity of languages, religions, and cultures, has managed to sustain a unified democratic identity. Europe has no less potential, only a deeper hesitation to act.

Conclusion: A Europe Worth Fighting For

European reform will be difficult, but meaningful change always is. If the EU is to remain globally relevant, its leaders must move beyond half-measures and embrace bold decisions that align with today's geopolitical realities. This transformation does not require abandoning Europe's founding values. It means preserving them by adapting to a world where ideals alone are no longer enough, ensuring that future generations can still say it is a privilege to be European, not a burden. The change the continent faces is impending and will be transformative. However, ultimately, if realized, it will contribute to a renaissance of the European spirit, which will be able to adapt to the challenges of the future.

Interview with Josh Eastright

Graham Owens

Josh Eastright is the CEO of Bloomberg Industry Group, an affiliate of Bloomberg based in Arlington, Virginia that provides news, data, analysis, and software workflow tools to professionals in the legal, tax & accounting, and government markets. He was appointed to the role in 2018, and since then has led a transformation of the business that has driven significant growth, while launching a number of workflow-focused solutions that integrate the company's unique collection of content and data with cutting-edge technologies such as generative AI.

A 25-year veteran of Bloomberg companies, Josh began his career based in New York working in sales and product development roles, including serving as Global Head of Commodities Markets where he oversaw Bloomberg's business, product development, and strategy in the energy, metals, agriculture, and shipping markets.

After leading Bloomberg's acquisition of New Energy Finance (now BloombergNEF), he moved to London where he led the corporate and product integration of the business, as well as managing its global commercial team. He then moved to Washington to join Bloomberg Government, where he was named President in 2016, and later brought the business together with Bloomberg BNA to form Bloomberg Industry Group.

Josh graduated from Amherst College where he majored in political science, and is a Chartered Financial Analyst. He is a Trustee of Building Bridges Across the River, a non-profit in DC's Ward 8 that operates THEARC facility and is building the 11th Street Bridge Park. He is also a Trustee of the Phillips Collection, a modern art museum in DC.'s Dupont Circle neighborhood. Josh is a member of the Economic Club of Washington and of the Federal City Council.

"If we could go back to before your time at Bloomberg... who or what were the influences that had the most profound impact on your professional path?"

"Yeah, I mean, so funnily enough, I was, it wasn't actually like a work type thing. It was, I was a swimmer all the way, you know, through college and I swam in college. And I think that was, what's interesting about, I think, just sports in general and swimming in particular is just the sort of discipline and the time management aspect of it. And I think particularly doing at the collegiate level, you, you know, you learn to, you learn to operate in multiple modes as a student, as an athlete, and, you know, the, the time management, the travel, and, you know, nobody's going to sort of give you a slack on, on your paper that's due, you know, the following week if you're tired from traveling over the weekend. That's probably, if there's anything I carry forward with me, that it's probably that experience, you know, from pre-high school, high school, college, that had the biggest influence on, on how I operate today still. I can't say I miss it, but it was a good experience."

"After you finished your career there and your time in college and got your foot in the door professionally, what initially drew you to Bloomberg and what made you feel that this industry was the right place to grow your career?"

"So, I got, I got really, really lucky. I was like, like a lot of swimmers. I was, I was a lifeguard and I was a swim coach for my summer job and, you know, my junior year, I think my dad was up for a swim meet and, you know, said, what are you going to do this summer? Cause like, you know, you can't be a lifeguard for the rest of your life. And I didn't really even know what an internship was, but, you know, he sort of guided me to, you know, maybe you should like look in the newspaper for, you know, what internships there are. So, you know, I, I literally stumbled across Bloomberg and was lucky enough to, you know, be an intern there in the, in, you know, in the early days. And what I, what I really loved about the place and I could feel it as a, an intern for, you know, two and a half months or whatever it was, it was just the energy of the place. The fact that I had people that I worked with who gave me real work to do, who trusted me, who gave me feedback and, you know, just made me hungry for more. So I didn't, you know, I knew I didn't necessarily want to do the work of the department that I was interning in, but I knew I liked the company. I knew I liked the people. I applied for their sales training program before I left the building at the, you know, at the end of the summer. Thought I would have been there for a couple of years and, you know, I'm there 26, 27 years later."

"That's such a unique case, I feel like, to start as an intern and end up where you are now in the same firm. Super cool."

"Yeah, it is. Although I and I give, you know, I give Mike Bloomberg a lot of credit for the culture that he's created, where it is a place where we really invest heavily in people at all levels. And there's a, there's a, is a deep sort of cultural goal to, you know, to find opportunities for people to try different things. You know, maybe, maybe it's not always a straight upward line, but it's, you know, get new skills, learn new things. And that collection of skills that you get over time sets you up for what the next job is. And I think it's a really special place that does that."

- "Do you feel that now, in your position, you strive to create a culture where folks can have a similar early-career experience to what you got to have?"
  - "We try to, I mean, we really try to, you know, it's a bigger, it's a bigger place than it was when I started. I mean, you know, the company when I was there was probably, when I started, I was like 5,000 people globally. I mean, we're probably, you know, we're probably now like 25,000 people globally or more. So it's a lot bigger. It's a lot more complicated. But in some ways that's good because it means there's more places that people can try things and more ways you can, you know, you can take those risks. I think the, the, the people that have been most successful over my, my time there that I've seen are the people that are willing to sort of take that risk of, okay, maybe I'm maybe I'm a salesperson, but I'm really interested in product. I'm going to maybe take a step back and take a more quote unquote junior role in product to get that experience. But, you know, in the long run that actually pays off. So I think that was, that was always my attitude of what's new and exciting I can try. And can I learn from this job? Can I learn from this boss?"

"Throughout your time at Bloomberg, you've worked across roles that touch news, government, and industry. What core similarities have you observed between these sectors, and where do you feel they diverge?"

"So, I mean, you know, we, we have three, three big customer types. There's, there's, there's attorneys who might be at a law firm. They might be, you know, they might be in a corporate legal department. We have tax professionals again, who might be at a big accounting firm like a PwC or something like that, or in a corporate tax department. And then we've got lobbyists and government, government employees. They're, what's common about all those people is they work in, in regulated industries and, you know, and they, they need precision. They have to be right, you know, and they need, they need gory detail. So what we have to do, it's a little bit different than say, you know, some kind of consumer news. You know, like if you're just watching, I'm not, I'm not, I'm not, by the way, I'm not saying anything bad about, you know, like a CFN or something like that. But our customers are the professional that's, that's actually working on, you know, someone's tax return or corporate tax return. And like, they have to, they can't just know that a tax bill passed. They've got to know the nitty gritty, gory detail of what's in that tax bill and how to calculate it, how to interpret the regulation when it comes out. So that's, that's the common similarity is that, that desire for detail, that desire to understand what's under the hood. They're all a little bit different, obviously. I mean, you know, the lobbyists, I mean, it's just being stereotypical. I mean, the lobbyists tend to be, you know, they can be more social, you know, they're going to be out there, you know, talking to people, they're, they're trying to understand, you know, interpersonal relationships and whatever. I mean, you know, tax people, they are some of the smartest people you'll meet. And they care about that. You know, they care about that gory detail of, you know, how that tax policy turns into an outcome for a company or a customer. But by, you know, by and large, they're, they're really, it's that commonality, I think, is probably the biggest thing."

"So moving more to the leadership side of things and how you operate there, I'm curious to learn more about how you balance optimizing people's strengths and experiences within your team versus pushing them outside of their comfort zone for growth. Basically, what your approach is to leading and maximizing the output of a diverse team?"

"I mean, you know, over, over time, it's changed a little bit because as you, as you take on more senior roles, the people that report to you, oftentimes are more expert at the job than you are yourself. You know, so my, you know, I've got a CTO now who reports to me, you know, he's, he's an engineer. He's been a CTO at other companies before. He knows more about technology than I do. You know, and he knows more about, you know, how to build product or about cyber than I do. But my job is to, is to help him to be successful. So it's my job to enable him to be successful. It's my job to kind of clear things out of his way and then to, you know, to help him grow as a professional. So whether it's, you know, if he's going to go speak at a conference or if he's going to go, you know, get involved and maybe he'll do some customer meetings, cause that's, that's something he's interested in, but he doesn't get to do every day. Earlier in my career, when I was managing people that, you know, that weren't as senior. Yeah, I think it's, it's the more you're, you know, you're trying to give people chances to try something that they haven't done before. And, you know, some, some people want that, other people don't, and you have to sort of be good at reading people and where they are and do they, you know, are they looking for growth and then talk to them about what they're trying to grow into. So if somebody is in, you know, again, if somebody is in sales and they say, well, I really want to be involved in product development. If you talked about, okay, well, why do you want to be in product development? What are you trying to, you know, what are you trying to learn about it? And then maybe it's, you know, maybe it's putting them on a task force that, you know, working with product people and engineers and they get to see how it works. And then you follow up with them. You said, okay, would you

like it with that? What did you not like about that? And then you kind of, you're constantly tuning the opportunity that the person's got to get them that exposure that they want. And hopefully that turns into, turns into whatever the next role is."

"That's a, that's a super interesting, super interesting idea that oftentimes, like you have to defer to the expertise of those who report to you even, and at the same time, like consider the structural role that you have as a manager."

"Yeah. Well, I mean, and I think it's particularly important for people as, you know, maybe not, maybe it's not your first management job, but as you start moving up, it really becomes something that I think people have to transition to. And it can be a hard transition because I think, you know, oftentimes, you know, you get promoted into a management role because you're the best at the job. And in a frontline manager job, sometimes you cut, you try to just keep doing the job you were doing. But then as you move up, you know, if you're going to be successful, you have to hire people that know more than you do. They have to be better than you. You know, otherwise, I mean, you just, you just can't do everything yourself. So you have to look for the best talent for the job there. They're probably smarter than you at whatever they're doing. They're probably better at that, but they knew it, whatever they're doing. And my job is to get stuff out of their way and help them to be successful. If I do that, everything works out great."

"If I could take it to a broader sense... how do you see people's relationship with news and information evolving over time? And given those shifts occurring in the country, how do you feel Bloomberg is strategically positioning itself for the years to come?"

"Yeah, we're pretty, we're pretty lucky in that our, our customer base and our products are primarily B2B. And, you know, we're our end consumer is a very specialized professional. So whether it's in the financial industry or the legal industry or the government industry, um, that person is buying Bloomberg or Bloomberg product to do their job. You know, they're looking to us for like very specialist information. They're not looking to us for general information. Um, so actually we've been lucky in that. I think our relationship with our readers, our relationship with our customers actually hasn't changed, um, the way that like a general news or social media news, um, has, has impacted, you know, in the, in the B2C world. Um, so, you know, when I talk to my customers, um, you know, they're actually, they're actually more, you know, um, interested in the news that we're writing today than I think they even were a couple of years ago, because they know that we're in that we're in that lane. We're focused on them. We're focused on making them successful at their day job. Um, and it's a little bit, um, it's a little bit freeing because, you know, we're not, I don't, you know, we, we, we don't, at least in my business, we don't sell advertising. I don't have to worry about clicks. I don't have to worry about, you know, anything else. All I have to worry about is my writing stuff. That's making my customer smarter, more informed, let them do their job better. And if they do that, they're going to keep coming back. And, um, and that's freeing in a lot of ways. I think it's, it's probably, you know, if I worked for a B2C news company or, um, a general news company, I might have a different answer for you. Um, but we're, we're quite lucky on that front."

"Yeah. It seems like you guys are a pretty unique exception to the growing mistrust that people have towards the media. On your guys' side though, how about in terms of research and reporting styles? Surely you've seen a ton of change there with technological innovation?"

"Yeah. It's, um, it, you see it in a couple of different ways. I mean, you know, we definitely, you know, we have things like generative AI in the newsroom, um, to help, to help people with things like summarization or, um, things like that. Um, you know, for example, you know, one good example that our editor in chief, um, put into place was, you know, we've trained a, um, a bot that with our style guide. So, you know, in the old days, um, a reporter would write their first draft. It would go to an editor. You know, the first thing the editor would do is spend a few minutes looking at it to make sure it met house style. Yeah. That's really, that's really, really important. Uh, cause we want our stories to be consistent, but is it the highest use of the editor's time? No, not really. Um, so now if that story comes to the editor already in house style, that editor can spend more time with the reporter, um, okay. Is it, is, are we getting to the point of the story quick enough? Do you have the right sourcing? Do you know, should you try to get another quote? Um, so it lets them have a much more elevated conversation. Um, and I, I think those are the sort of opportunities, you know, when I think about the world of news, um, you know, no, no reporter wants to be writing, uh, wants to be writing summaries of something, right? No reporter wants to be doing that, that kind of work. They want to be out there developing sources, um, talking to people, breaking big news, um, writing about big issues that, you know, only a human can, you know, can have those, those ideas. Um, I think that's what a lot of these tools and what the technology is letting people do. Um, so that's, that's on the technology side. Um, you know, on the DC side, I think it's, um, you know, we've got people who are up on Capitol Hill. We've got people who are in the white house. We've got people who are in the agencies, you know, and I, I've not been, I've been in this job, like, you know, I got, I got in this, um, you know, got to Washington when, uh, in Obama's second term. So, you know, so I've seen, I've seen Obama, I've seen Trump, I've seen Biden, I've seen Trump again. I mean, they've all got their, you know, they, they've all required you to sort of change and shift your, your approach. Um, but you know, that our, our job is to report on what's, what's going on. I mean, our job is to report and get, you know, and pull out for professional customer. What's the most important thing that you need to know, um, that is going to help you be a better lawyer, be a better

tax advisor, be a better government affairs professional. Um, it doesn't really matter who's, you know, who's, who's in the white house or who's controlling Congress, you know, uh, but they've each brought their own challenges."

"**If I could follow up briefly—what are some of the challenges that you feel Trump, for example, presents for your reporting?**"

"Well, I mean, look, I think in some ways it's, um, you know, in some ways it, it'll take a question at any time, right? I mean, so that's, that's positive, right? It's an advantage. Yeah. Uh, right. Um, in other cases, look, I think there's been, um, there's been, there's been other challenges. I mean, we, you know, we had a reporter in the Pentagon. We don't have a reporter in the Pentagon now. Um, so there, you know, I think those are, um, there's puts and takes. Yeah. Fair enough. And another, uh, thing you included there that I'm interested in was, was AI in regard, in regards to that, it seems like now your approach is to use it as an aid so that your people can get more of the, you know, really deep qualitative work done and, you know, assist rather than replace them."

"**Moving forward, do you feel you're looking for AI to continue to take on a larger work share of what people do, or is that sort of guiding approach that you mentioned going to stay in place?**"

"I believe in what I said, um, earlier, you know, I really, I really think excellent, you know, the, the kind of reporting that we do and the kind of news that our customers expect from us, I think there is always going to be a place for a human in that. And I, I think actually the AI is going to let our reporters be even more strategic. Um, it's going to, it's going to let them write, um, more, you know, more investigative news, more, you know, deep, you know, deeply sourced news, spend more time building their sources, uh, source lists. Um, so I, I really do believe that I don't, um, you know, in Washington in particular, I think is a, is a news market where I think that's particularly true because, you know, a reporter in Washington can go into the Capitol and walk around. And I mean, the access is utterly incredible. I mean, you can talk to any member of Congress in the hallways or in the office buildings, you know, you can develop sources with, you know, key staff members. Um, and I can't do that. Yeah. Right. I mean, it's really amazing. And then the same thing, you know, in the agencies that, you know, that we cover, um, you know, did people in the white house press pool. I mean, you really, it, it, it is reporting in Washington as a full contact sport. Um, and it requires you to be on the field. It's not, um, you know, so I don't think AI can do that, but I do think AI can let our reporters have more time to do that critical work and then invest it in, you know, a great piece of journalism and make it even better."

"**What advice would you offer to ambitious young people interested in potentially following your footsteps or hoping to make a real impact in their careers?**"

"I mean, look, I think you gotta find, um, you gotta find a company that is gonna, you know, I, I always, I, I'm grateful to Bloomberg for having a program, uh, both when I was an intern and then in my first year that gave me this opportunity to learn almost more than anything else. Um, I, I, I, I got incredible training. I got to sit alongside some really good, you're talented professionals. And, um, the thing that I was most expected to do was to learn. And I, and I think, um, early in your career coming out of college, um, you know, look for a place where, you know, yeah, maybe it's going to be hard and yes, it's going to be work, right. But are you, you know, are you going to learn things? You're going to pick up new skills. You're going to learn how to work with new people. Are you going to be surrounded by managers and colleagues that want to work, you know, want, want to pass on their knowledge to you and, and, and give you feedback. Um, I think if you do, if you're doing that early in your career, um, you know, that that's time you don't get back, right. As you know, and I, and then I think, you know, the other thing I'd say is as you're in your career early, you have this blessing of, of, of time, you know, you think you're busy, uh, but you know, you don't, you don't, you don't have kids or you don't have a spouse or you don't have whatever else going on. Um, what else can you keep learning? What else can you read, you know, about your market, about your business, about something else you're interested in, but, you know, keep that, um, you, you have this sort of inertia of, um, of, um, you're a student, you're, you're good at studying, you're good at learning things. So carry that forward into your career and carry that curiosity. Um, and that sets you up incredibly well for the rest of your career. Um, you know, and maybe the first thing that you do isn't exactly what you want to do, but hopefully you picked up some nuggets from that and you picked up some, some advice from people you work with and then you take that to the next, to the next thing that you do."

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