

The Free Forum.4

Fascism

in the
modern

day

student essays
on politics and the economy

Editor's Note

As we enter an era of political violence in all regions of the world, it has become more important than ever to encourage discussion, debate, and the sharing of perspectives.

This seemed an essential task when we published our first edition of The Free Forum in mid-2024. Since then, we have published articles on politics and economics from current students and alumni of a variety of institutions across Europe, the UK, and the US. Now, in its fourth iteration, The Free Forum has the financial backing of the LSE Student Union's Fund and individual donors. This backing has allowed for a vastly increased circulation and guarantees support for at least the next three editions.

As we look forward to the future of this project, I must first look backwards to the putting together of what you now hold in your hands. In doing so, I must express my immense gratitude to the small but impressively effective team of editors, without whom this would not have been possible.

They are Theo Allen Baptista, our copy editor; Conor Hatfield, our communications and outreach officer; Henry Hughes, our associate editor-in-chief; and Luca La Cava, our creative director. While all had individual roles, this really was a collaborative team effort, and I cannot thank them enough.

To the authors: thank you for volunteering your time, often during busy periods, to this project. I am always taken aback by the support that you all give to The Free Forum.

The depolarisation of society is an essential component of rebuilding the integrity and the strength of our democracies. This requires an active effort to carve out spaces for constructive debate. Complacency is the enemy of democracy.

For details on how to join this effort and contribute to future editions, please see the final page. I hope you all enjoy it.

Hugo Jamison
Editor-in-Chief

Contents

Foreword	4
AfD - A Threat to Democracy	6
The Duality of (Wo)Man	10
Rotten Thoughts	13
Mehdi Hassan and the Fascist Debate	15
Economic Individualism and Inequality	20
How Do You Predict the Future?	23
Nostalgia, Mythmaking and the Politics of Work	25
Money is a Good	30
You Should Not Have an Opinion on San Francisco	32
How to Fight Fascism	34
Can Scouts End Fascism?	39
Cheers, Sante, Prost, Kanpai	41
End Note	44

Foreword

At this year's Féile an Phobail in Belfast, I had the pleasure of attending a discussion between Avi Shlaim, Chris Agee (editor of Irish Pages), and Francesca Albanese (UN Special Rapporteur for the Palestinian Occupied Territories). The crowd gathered for a launch of Shlaim's latest book, *Genocide in Gaza: Israel's Long War on Palestine*. Shlaim's book makes the claim that "Netanyahu's government does not display all the features of classical fascism but arguably enough of them, especially militarism, to merit the label 'fascist'."

"Fascist", for many, has become merely a pejorative term. One devoid of real weight, thrown around without consideration for the significance it carries. So unserious now is it as an accusation, so far has the Overton Window on the term's taboo shifted, that this summer we have seen it gleefully embraced rather than shamefully denied (see Huang's article on the Mehdi Hasan debate).

'The term fascism needs to be rescued from sloppy usage, not thrown out because of it. It remains indispensable. We need a generic term for what is a general phenomenon'. This is what Robert Paxton wrote in his book *Anatomy of Fascism* in 2004. It is a notion which I have obsessed over for some time now and believe is more urgent than ever.

Many times, I have felt my standing in the eyes of comrades and opponents slip merely by employing the term, and I have therefore been endlessly frustrated by the malaise toward the fascist turn which this nominative negligence has borne us.

Paxton suggests that the most important factor in identifying the roots of fascism lies in a somewhat abstract register of society. What he describes as "subterranean passions and emotions." He argues, 'the establishment of a "mood" is more important than "the search for some individual precursors"'. I encourage you to seek out this text, which is easily accessible, as his list of the nine 'mobilising passions' which constitute the foundation of fascist movements are required reading in this most crucial fight. They are infinitely useful in identifying instances of what is ostensibly a "general phenomenon", whilst nonetheless habitually inconsistent in its iterations. I will cite others, but a simple proof here is in using one of the passions to think about relations of the populace to power; 'the superiority of the leader's instincts over abstract and universal reason' (see Olson's article on Donald Trump and nostalgia).

As familiar readers of The Free Forum will recognise, focusing on an overarching theme in this way is a break in tradition.

Rather than the thematic eclecticism which characterised previous issues, you will find amongst the articles a thread which pulls on modern fascism and its various forms. The sheer urgency with which this dangerous phenomenon must be addressed has been the driving factor in our thematic shift. Our mission has only been compounded by the fact we are going to print the week after Israel's strike on Doha and Charlie Kirk's assassination. The significance of these events, and the subsequent acceleration of the political 'mood' throughout the Trans-Atlantic West, are cause for alarm and for action.

Isaac Herzog, the Israeli President, rationalised the unilateral Doha strike by stating, 'If you want to move on, you have to remove some of the people if they are not willing to get that deal'. Perhaps Avi Shlaim would agree this confirms his assessment of Netanyahu's government as fascist, and indeed it is one of many Israeli actions which constitutes Paxton's final passion, namely 'the right of the chosen people to dominate others without restraint from any kind of human or divine law, right being decided by the sole criterion of the group's prowess within a Darwinian struggle.'

In assessing the life and death of Charlie Kirk, we can cite with irony another one of Paxton's passions, 'the primacy of the group, toward which one has duties superior to every right, whether individual or universal, and the subordination of the individual to it' for he abhorrently reconciled gun deaths resul-

tant from the "net good" of an armed citizenry via comparison with the road deaths resultant from motor transport. As we all know, he joined one of these statistics himself, with the ripple effects bound to be both intense and nefarious.

The tragedy of our times must not paralyse us into inaction, and thus I will leave you with Paxton's tentative definition of fascism. Something to consider as you leaf through this edition, and for you to carry with you into the turbulent world we find ourselves navigating:

'Fascism may be defined as a form of political behaviour marked by obsessive preoccupation with community decline, humiliation, or victimhood and by compensatory cults of unity, energy, and purity, in which a mass-based party of committed nationalist militants, working in uneasy but effective collaboration with traditional elites, abandons democratic liberties and pursues with redemptive violence and without ethical or legal restraints goals of internal cleansing and external expansion.'
Robert Paxton, 2004.

Henry Hughes
Associate Editor-in-Chief

Alternative für Deutschland (AfD) - A Threat to Democracy

On the 2nd of May 2025, the Alternative für Deutschland Party (AfD) - Alternative for Germany - was officially deemed as a far-right extremist group by the German Domestic Intelligence Service (BfV). Occupying 24% of seats in the Bundestag (the national parliament) and 15% of seats in the Landtag (the regional parliament), the AfD poses a certain threat amidst the growing far-right nationalist and populist movements proliferating throughout the globe. For the time being, German voter support for right-wing extremist parties remains low, with electoral successes being isolated. However, this support is on the rise and should not be underestimated. A society in which extreme far-right politics reign supreme, one which is nationalist, antisemitic, racist, and xenophobic, is, above all, undesirable. It is with this mindset that one must fight against the rising tide of populist politics.

As it is a central theme throughout this year's newspaper, it is important to define and distinguish between far-right extremism and fascism. The 'far-right' is an umbrella term. It encompasses the political leanings of groups, regardless of the Nation-State, which centre around sovereignty, strict immigration policies, and a strong connec-

tion to the social contract wherein the State acts on behalf of the People in order to protect them. All far-right parties anchor themselves with nationalism. Sheltered underneath the 'far-right' umbrella, fascism refers to the populist political philosophy, movement, or regime that glorifies race and nation, placing the individual below the State. A fascist government is characterised by extreme social and economic control and the severe suppression and oppression of opponents.

Unfortunately, the popularity of these far-right groups is not novel to us. The case of Germany, or rather the Third Reich, as it was known at the time, is the biggest example of all. Targeting a disillusioned population following the First World War, after the signing of the Versailles Treaty in 1919, far-right rhetoric manipulated the discontent stemming from costly war reparations, which wrecked the economy and Article 231 of the Versailles Treaty, which affirmed that the sole responsibility concerning World War I and the aggression that ensued lay on Germany. It is in using this rhetoric that the fascist National Socialist Workers' Party (NSDAP), led by Adolf Hitler, rose to power. Their ascension to power directly led to the Second World War and the Ho-

locust, which, together, reaped 70-85 million lives, representing the death of approximately 3% of the global population at the time.

As a result, we have come to use the phrase 'Never Again'. Never again should genocide be repeated. Never again should violence on this scale recur. Never again should the foundations of fascism be rebuilt. Nevertheless, the rise of the far-right in Germany, as well as in Europe, begs the question: Should we be concerned? In the context of the AfD, yes, we should.

Founded in 2013 after splitting from the Christian Democratic Union, and currently being co-led by Timo Chrupella and Alice Weidel, the AfD shot to popularity, becoming the second biggest party in Germany, and thus the largest opposition party, in the span of 12 years. The party consists of far-right, extremist, populist, and national-conservative individuals, aiming to 'reclaim' German sovereignty and pride, reportedly lost due to a 'laughable' culture of collective guilt, resulting from its Nazi past. In fact, according to a 2019 Forsa Institute study concerning Holocaust denial amongst the German population, approximately 2% argued that the Holocaust was propaganda of the Allied Powers. Even more concerning, 15% of AfD supporters profess profound scepticism regarding the verity of the Holocaust. This trend is indicative of a growing trend of revisionist history, characteristic of ultra-nationalist, extremist, and fascist ideology. It is crucial to remember

that history that is left unheeded is history that is left repeated.

Looking more clearly into their manifesto, the AfD rejects dual citizenship, Islam, and refugees. Instead of the promotion of multiculturalism, the AfD wishes to replace it with the German 'guiding culture', more specifically, Christianity, Antiquity, and German traditions, stating that multiculturalism is actually 'non-culture'. As a result, the AfD advocates for Germany's exit from the Eurozone, simultaneously condemning Schengen borders, stating concerns for economic and national security. Despite proclaiming that education is not a place for indoctrination, the AfD's manifesto strongly disapproves of Islam being taught in Religious Studies due to their 'non-churchlike structure'. They push for the re-establishment of the traditional nuclear family, adding that the 'Gender-ideology' is both unnatural and 'hostile to the 'Constitution'. What is particularly interesting is that the AfD wishes to change the German constitution in order to allow the German Bundeskanzler to be voted in via direct democracy rather than the current system, whereby leaders are voted indirectly.

The German Grundgesetz, literally translated as the German 'Basic Law', refers to the 51-page constitution, written in 1949 in the wake of the Third Reich. This document embodies the definitive legal framework of the German democratic system, stating the 146 fundamental rights and obligations of all people in the Federal German

Republic. It may be amended but never contradicted. Its sanctity is such that in the past 70 years, no serious modifications to the Constitution have been made. This constitution protects people from far-right extremism by enshrining fundamental rights such as the right to dignity, freedom, privacy, free assembly, freedom of the press, and the right to political asylum.

The three most important articles are as follows:

Article 1a: Everybody is equal under the law.

Article 1c: Nobody is allowed to be discriminated against or favoured due to their gender, ancestry, race, language, homeland and origin, faith, religious beliefs, and/or political views.

Article 21b: Parties which, by their aims or the conduct of their supporters, aim to impair or eliminate the free democratic basic order or to endanger the existence of the Federal Republic of Germany are unconstitutional.

Beginning with these three articles, the AfD proves already to be unconstitutional. Due to their populist and extremist nature, the AfD poses a threat to the 'free democratic basic order' and, as such, provides sufficient grounds for banning the party from public politics. Changing the electoral system for the Bundeskanzler from indirect democracy to direct democ-

racy opens the door for a far-right extremist leader to take charge. With the Islamophobic, homophobic, and frankly, fascist rhetoric promoted through the AfD's manifesto, such a reality would lead to a society characterised by extreme social and economic control and the severe suppression and oppression of opponents. By deeming the AfD as a 'right-wing extremist' party, the BfV claimed that the AfD opposed central principles such as human dignity, the rule of law, equality before the law and democracy. They highlighted that the AfD acts in a nationalist, racist or xenophobic manner, showing blanket rejection of ethnic or cultural minorities. They hinted that the party advocated for or at least supported violence as a means of achieving political goals. Lastly, the BfV called attention to the fact that the AfD represents antisemitic, revisionist, and/or anti-democratic ideologies. All of this provides ample ground on which to constitutionally ban the AfD.

Nevertheless, this far-right extremist party continues to operate on the democratic stage, and there are solid reasons why. For one, actually banning a party is difficult. It has only happened twice before - once in 1952 (for the neofascist Socialist Reich Party) and in 1956 (for the Communist Party of Germany). Attempts to ban the neo-Nazi National Democratic Party were unsuccessful. Secondly, any campaign to ban the party, along with the ban itself, provides the platform for the AfD to present itself as a victim, as an oppressed political group. Manipulat-

ing motions for a ban, the AfD could pick up the microphone and echo fascist rhetoric, and proclaim that they operate within an unjust system, within which they take up arms to fight. The ban also poses a moral dilemma as banning a political party with a different mindset undermines the pillars of democracy - freedom of choice, freedom of speech, political tolerance, and the acceptance of election results.

Nonetheless, leaving Germany vulnerable to the threat of extremism, such as the AfD, could mean that maybe sooner rather than later, there is no more democracy left to defend. Thus, if the German Constitution provides a barrier to sweeping the rug underneath the legs of the AfD, how do we fight against the rising tide of neo-fascist extremism?

I stand in with pulling the rug underneath the legs of the AfD. The ban procedure may be risky, both legally and politically, but it would take away the party's legitimacy on the political forum. Due to this risk, however, this cannot be the sole move in the fight against far-right extremism, both in Germany and elsewhere.

As it currently stands, the most important action is to defeat the AfD at the ballot box. In placing the party in an unelectable political suspension, too unpopular to be elected, yet unable to play the victim, the pillars of democracy would continue to stand strong, whilst also providing the opportunity to monitor and document their actions. In surveilling their actions, preventative

measures for future far-right extremist movements are put in place. However, for this to be effective, one must vote.

Voting is the utmost important cornerstone of democracy. Without it, populist movements gain momentum, allowing the political minority to rule the majority. The Constitution is there to set the groundwork for the society that one lives in. Nonetheless, democracy stands for the demos. The people.

To conclude, the case of the AfD reflects a concerning global political tendency towards far-right politics. Written in black and white, the policies of the AfD represent a fascist and extremist desire to create a society that is racist, Islamophobic, antisemitic, homophobic, masculinist, and most importantly, a society that is undesirable. Participating politically is key to using political diversity to our advantage. To monitor threats to democracy. To prevent history from repeating.

Jennifer Wendorff

MA Global European Studies,
Universität Konstanz

The Duality of (wo)Man: Examining the Position of Female Fascists in Europe

A patriarch, a white supremacist, and a capitalist walk into a bar. What is one thing they all have in common? Their roots in fascism. Merriam-Webster's definition of fascism outlines it as a 'populist political philosophy, movement, or regime that exalts nation and often race above the individual, that is associated with a centralised autocratic government headed by a dictatorial leader, and that is characterised by severe economic and social regimentation and by forcible suppression of opposition.'

Fascism is a political ideology devoid of humanity, compassion, empathy, and respect. As could be predicted, political movements rooted in fascism are often headed by men- Mussolini, Hitler, Franco. Contemporary examples include Netanyahu and Trump. However, it's not all men. Women dabble in fascism too.

Marine Le Pen (National Rally), Riikka Purra (Finns Party), Alice Weidel (Alternative for Germany), Giorgia Meloni (Brothers of Italy), Pia Kjaersgaard (Danish People's Party), Siv Jensen (Progress Party), and Beata Szydło (Law and Justice) are only a few of the latest examples of influential far-right women leaders. (Pietiläinen, 2024). These women all have something in common; all are from European

countries. In fact, when researching contemporary fascist figures, it was hard to find prominent examples of female fascists from North America.

Elizabeth Dilling is a notable historical example; however, she died in 1966 and can hardly be said to be directly relevant to fascism in the 21st century. We could consider female members of Trump's Republican Party to be fascists, as undoubtedly, they are propping up his regime. However, none of these lovely ladies seem to have the same twisted spark as their European equivalents. Their role is predominantly demonstrative, in that, within the gender relations framework of today's fascists, they serve as the superlative exemplar of the modern American woman. I am left only with internet sensation Hannah Pearl Davis, who, despite exerting cultural influence, has yet to make a name for herself on the political stage.

On reflection, it almost seems as though the glass ceiling for female fascists in Europe is slightly more malleable than for their American counterparts. How could that be?

It is important to note that, percentage-wise, there are more female politicians in the European Parliament than in the US Congress. In 2025, the percentage of women in the European Parliament was 38.7%

compared to the US Congress's 28.2%. That is to say that if there are more elected female politicians in Europe, it is more likely that there will be a higher number of female fascist politicians in Europe. However, despite these basic arithmetical facts, there is a clear disparity between the popularity of EU female fascist politicians when compared to their US colleagues. We should consider several different theories to explain why female fascists are more successful in Europe than in the United States.

Perhaps the fragmented nature of the US's political system means that women's rights are more protected in some states than in others. There are no federal constitutional guarantees of gender equality (the Equal Rights Amendment having never been ratified). Women's access to third-level education, employment and adequate healthcare is compromised, making it more difficult for them to climb the career ladder and 'make it' as politicians. In Europe, women's rights are protected, if not constitutionally by domestic law, by EU Treaties and Directives; the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights explicitly guarantees gender equality. This ultimately makes it easier for them to progress in their careers as politicians.

Another theory as to why there are fewer influential female fascist politicians in the US relates to the hegemonic nature of the two-party system. This system means there is little opportunity for women to make their mark politically. Both parties are long-established and generally headed by men who don't want to, or think to, give a

woman a seat at the table.

Hillary Clinton and Kamala Harris stand out as exceptions that prove the rule. Despite their prominence within the Democratic Party, their gender was consistently treated as a legitimate political concern during their presidential campaigns, both of which ended in defeat. Although of course, there are other elements which complicated both their candidacies. Clinton was reviled by portions of the electorate as a representative of the 'deep state' for her role in previous administrations. For Harris, it was her status as a racialised individual. The impact of these factors, among others, compounded with the gender of both these women, holding them back from office.

This suggests that in the US, even when a woman comes close to attaining the highest political office, her gender continues to be perceived as a valid obstacle in the eyes of many voters. Because of the political system's reluctance to welcome a possible third-party candidate, the woman is left with little ability to make a seat for herself.

Due to the international nature of the EU and the design of the European Parliament, a two-party system would be logistically impossible. A multi-party system as wide as the EU allows greater scope for grassroots political candidates to meaningfully contest elections, and they therefore stand a better chance of reaching the political stage than comparably grassroots actors in the US.

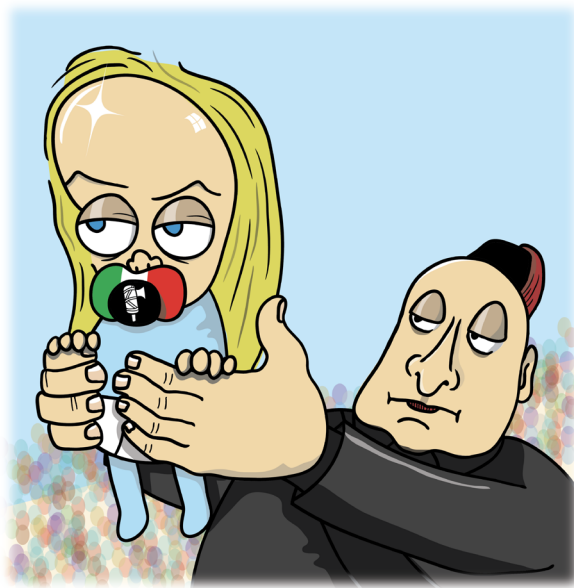
What I conclude from both hypotheticals, however, is that the political power held by female

fascists in the 21st century only exists because of progress made by feminist organisations and human rights groups who extended political agency to non-male actors during the course of the 20th century. Crucially, these are the same groups the aforementioned politicians attempt to undermine and even destroy.

It is deeply contradictory for a woman to advance fascist ideals as a political leader, given that her position is only possible because feminists fought for the rights and opportunities fascism seeks to deny.

Clare McCorry

Masters' Human Rights & Humanitarian
Action, Sciences Po



LC25

Rotten Thoughts

'Silence is not always good. Silence born of fear is not good silence. Even children can express their thoughts. Sometimes their thoughts are surprisingly original. Woe betide anyone who stifles thoughts. A blocked thought becomes rotten.'

While on holiday, I tuned into a talk show about politics. The listeners spoke vehemently yet in a strangely monotonous tone, as if all passion had been flattened into a single frequency. Instead of tempering excesses, the presenter prodded them toward sharper edges, provoking and radicalising the exchange until the atmosphere grew tense – and still monotonous. It felt like a storm trapped in a jar: lightning without illumination, noise without movement. This, to me, is what Aharon Appelfeld's phrase 'rotten thought' in *A Story of a Life* warns against: thinking sealed off from air and light, pressurised by fear or conformity until it festers.

Silence, in this sense, is rarely neutral. There is the attentive quiet of listening, the humility that makes room for another voice, and then the quiet born of fear, self-interest, or the craving for a 'quiet life' the kind that tacitly endorses injustice by refusing to name it. We know this silence from history and from daily life: the neighbour who 'doesn't want trouble', the official who 'just follows orders', the colleague who bites their tongue to protect a position. Such silence is not empty; it exerts pressure. It compresses the moral space in which thought might breathe and act.

Yet the opposite mistake – constant speech that blocks thought – was on display at the talk show. When outrage becomes routine, it hardens into a ritual, and rituals, especially media rituals, can operate like insulation. Calls came in, opinions flared, but nothing was truly at risk; the presenter guided callers along grooves already cut, ensuring no deviation from the familiar storyline. The energy was high, the variation low. Paradoxically, the louder the show grew, the less alive the thinking felt. A thought can rot not only in secrecy, but also in the embalming fluid of repetition.

Appelfeld's line about children matters in this sense. Children can voice ideas that are startlingly original precisely because they're not yet disciplined by cliché. They ask the unapproved question, point to the unnoticed contradiction, and name the elephant without euphemism. Their originality is not cleverness; it is freshness. They have not learned the adult art of rehearsed assent. The blocked thought he warns against is the adult counterpart: ideas that no longer risk surprise because they no longer meet reality on its own terms. Our age congratulates itself on candour; yet much of what we call frankness is scripted performance.

'Let the air flow and let the light in'. Air stands for plurality – other voices, counterarguments, inconvenient facts. Light stands for disclosure – naming what is actually there, not what our faction requires to be there. Without air, thought suffocates in the heat of its own

certainty. Without light, it decays in the dark. Either way, the result is predictable: minds ossify, thoughts stagnate, and hearts harden. If we want to resist that hardening, we have to cultivate conditions where genuine thinking can circulate.

The media dynamics that encourage rot are well known. Algorithms prefer engagement, and engagement is smoother when surprise is limited to indignation. The combustible mix of familiarity and fury keeps us tuned in while narrowing our field of vision. Communities form not around a shared search for truth but around shared cues for applause and boos. The result is an echo chamber that feels like conversation but functions as insulation. We 'talk' constantly and say very little. Silence would be preferable to this, if it were the silence of attention. Too often, though, the quiet that follows such performances is only the quiet of fatigue.

What counters rotten thought? Courage, certainly, the courage to break fear's silence. But also, tenderness: the gentleness that lets a tentative idea be heard before it is judged. The figure of the nun in Appelfeld's pages, close to another's torment, suggests a third ingredient: presence that refuses both the complicity of fearful quiet and the brutality of rhetorical combat. Such presence ventilates the mind. Practical habits help too: read across your allergies; keep a notebook of questions that embarrass your own side; restate an opponent's view so they would recognise it, then critique it; invite correction; switch mediums when you need depth; practise 'slow opinion' by

waiting before broadcasting a take.

Most of all, unblock thought at its source. Fear breeds blockage – fear of ostracism, of losing face, or being wrong. We can normalise small failures as the cost of real inquiry. A conversation where it is safe to say 'I don't know' is one where learning is possible. Rot sets in when status matters more than truth; freshness returns when truth is allowed to rearrange our status. That requires families, classrooms, and workplaces where candour is paired with mercy.

The call-in show could have been different. A single genuine – 'Can you tell me more?' – can punch a hole in the jar and let a cross-breeze in. Over time, the atmosphere changes: vehemence gives way to variety, monotony to nuance. The programme might become less 'entertaining', in the narrow sense, and more alive.

Thought is a living system. Block its inlets and outlets, and decay begins; open them, and circulation resumes. Notice where fear is quieting you, where habit is scripting you, where noise is numbing you. Then choose the small courage that names, the small humility that listens, the small patience that waits. Air. Light. Keep them flowing, and minds need not ossify, thoughts need not stagnate, and hearts need not harden.

Matteo Salvemini

Graduate of MSc History of
International Relations, LSE

Managing Director of Liberi Oltre le Illusioni

Mehdi Hasan and the fascist debate: An outsider's view

I: The fascist debate and its discontent

A few weeks ago, renowned progressive journalist Mehdi Hasan appeared on an American political debate show to debate 20 far-right individuals. As of writing, the original 2-hour video has garnered over 11 million views, alongside countless derivative clips, reactions, analyses, reporting, etc. The platform, Jubilee, markets itself as hosting civil debates but is known for creating clickbait spectacles. This particular series, Surrounded, features a single (often well-known) media figure sitting in the middle of 20 participants, running for a chance to debate them. Hitherto, the spotlight character has mostly been conservative figureheads, such as Charlie Kirk, Ben Shapiro, and Candice Owens. From this perspective, Mehdi is surely a welcome presence.

The results were predictably one-sided: Mehdi destroyed them by common verdict. One expects nothing less from the best public debater in the English-speaking world, but any analysis of this debate must begin by applauding Mehdi's incredible performance. His dominating intellectual superiority is captured by a viral comment: 'Mehdi are not surrounded by them;

they are surrounded by Mehdi'. His famed rhetorical abilities were again on full display. He later made a deservedly self-congratulating video called 'How'd Mehdi do it? 7 Debate Lessons from Jubilee', recycling some of his advice in *How to Win Every Argument* (2023).

Starting with the 20 far-right, this debate confirms Noam Chomsky's prophetic observation in 2015 that there's no longer an organised Republican 'party', but only a 'radical insurgency' whose sole objective is to dismantle institutions. White nationalism has increasingly overtaken the traditional 'conservatives' as the pillar of the Republican Party. One is only shocked by how shamelessly public they are with their bigotries and racism, with one 'Connor' openly proclaiming himself to be 'fascist' while receiving applause. That being said, it's also wrong to treat the 20 far-right as undifferentiated. There were differing degrees of support for open violence or blatant authoritarianism, suggesting not all was unredeemable. For example, one challenger confessed to Mehdi that he was a Deferred Action for Childhood Arrival (DACA) beneficiary. He had an epiphany of self-reflection before quickly being voted out by other participants. Partly, one presumes,

due to his realisation that fellow far-righters are sure to purge him should they get to power. The last ten minutes on birthright citizenship also provided the only semblance of civil debate.

Mehdi Hasan put forward four claims: 1) Trump is pro-crime; 2) Trump is defying the Constitution; 3) Immigrants are good for America; 4) Trump's plan for Gaza is ethnic cleansing. Obviously, I support all these propositions, yet this is precisely where my discontent begins as an 'outsider'. Conceding my ignorance of American political nuances, I might in turn detect certain shared prejudices and missing elements beyond the rhetorical frenzy.

The most glaring omission is that, except for the Gaza segment (more on that later), the majority of the debate was framed by Mehdi as essentially institutional or 'cultural war' issues. Everything was on 'superstructure', never anything material or socio-economic. This was a marked contrast with Mehdi's friend Sam Seder, who on the same platform debated the claim 'Trump policies make the rich richer and the working class poorer'. Hence, his debate was noticeably more effective in communicating a material case against Trump. It also contrasted with a more recent guest on this series, Cenk Uyghur, a brash class reductionist who nevertheless touches people's material concerns. For all of Mehdi's rhetorical skill, he remained within the establishment's familiar anti-Trump framework, which, as we know, stopped working a long time ago. Trump being 'pro-crime' and 'defying the Constitution' was institutional defence

par excellence, which collided with the populist right's anti-establishment hysteria that forecloses an exchange based on mutual interest. All that was left were rhetorical beatings that generated a sea of content but led nowhere.

The most explosive part of the whole episode was predictably the immigration debate. At some point during that segment, Mehdi did mention something about the ambiguous 'top 1%', but it was quickly dropped and never became the focus. Instead, he hammers the point about elite immigrants' ingenuity and entrepreneurship, as if they weren't based on millions of workers, immigrants or otherwise. Devoid of any class perspectives, there was nothing on the exploited immigrant labourers that sustained America's cheap consumer goods or the penniless immigrant peasants forced to cross the border because their lands were droughted by American corporations. Which immigrants is Mehdi speaking for? Are we to ignore that ICE's victims, for example, are so disproportionately class-based?

In fact, as far as economics goes, Mehdi even made the shockingly out-of-touch claim that the American economy is doing 'pretty well'. This is a typical elite bias of statistics over perception, something that cost the 2024 election for Democrats. The point is, Trump lost the 2020 election not because his supporters were persuaded of his criminal or unconstitutional nature, but because his COVID handling was sociologically disastrous. Similarly, despite the glaringly unconstitutional January 6th riot, he still won

the 2024 election, not because he defended himself constitutionally, but because he offered a coherent vision (no matter how 'wrong') in a chaotic material condition.

In an interview after the show, Mehdi complained that the far right only cared about his immigration claim. But from this perspective, this is partly Mehdi's fault and the liberal elites he's speaking for. The institutional jargon never touched them, so it is far more likely that the mobs turn to the at least slightly more tangible immigration issue. Sitting across from them, Mehdi himself was an immigrant of Indian descent, which subjected him to some appallingly racist and aggressive comments.

Mehdi's participation, however, was a controversy in and of itself. One side suggests it's crucial to expose and publicly humiliate the fascists and to alarm people about what we are confronting. Responses to the debate are filled with unsurprising revulsion towards the far-right participants. Meanwhile, the other side opposes platforming the far-right at all. They argue that they legitimise the far-right rhetoric and launder their views. This opposition is articulated by analysts like Alice Cappelle, who have long critiqued the entire Jubilee platform. She supported an online petition pressuring YouTube to demonetise Jubilee for profiting off platforming harmful views and rage baits. Both sides seem to have legitimate arguments, and Mehdi confessed to being 'torn' himself on whether to regret this participation. This dilemma is continued in one of Mehdi's post-event interviews on what's the

best way to 'deradicalise' these far-right. There's no doubt of their good intention, but this diction is symptomatic. Radicalisation itself is not the problem, only in which direction. To condemn anything 'radical' is a common establishment bias. Climate issues, for example, could surely use a lot more radicalisation to break the general apathy. Overall, however, this controversy logically boils down to the core problem: How should we fight them?

II: Decentring America

At this point, acute readers might feel a certain uneasiness. In all the analyses above, I have been speaking in an entirely American context. How should 'we' fight 'them'? 'We' as American citizens, 'them' as people challenging 'our' values. There's an unspoken assumption that America's problem is the political problem. The point of this article, however, is to step outside. Alice Capelle, for example, is a French analyst, therefore more able to problematise the entire event. Hence, one must be a double 'outsider' to properly situate this debate: outside of the establishment's 'culture war' discourse to see socio-politics, and outside of America to see what kind of discursive space they were debating in.

Despite its freedom of expression, mainstream American political discourse is incredibly narrow. Noam Chomsky captured the paradox perfectly: 'The smart way to keep people passive and obedient is to strictly limit the spectrum of acceptable opinion but allow very lively debate within that spectrum'. The contrast between Corbyn and Sultana's new left-wing party in the

UK and the stale American duopoly cannot be more acute. This paralyzing spectrum's other expression is to monopolise the concept of 'left' and 'right', when in reality they both have a much richer tradition than the two faces of the same corporate party. This is symptomatically expressed in the debate. As Mehdi criticised Trump on crime, for example, the instant reaction of his defenders is to accuse 'your side' (e.g., Democrats) of being no better.

Here, one is reminded of Dipesh Chakrabarty's concept of 'asymmetric knowledge'. Western people can afford to be ignorant of the outside world without inconvenience, but non-Westerners must know about the West. Nowadays, with America's undisputed cultural hegemony, the rest of the world is always trapped within this asymmetry in regard to America. Headlines upon headlines of Trump's latest lunacy are shoved against the will of everyone, while Americans are not required to know anything beyond the stereotypical clichés of other countries. The case of China offers a further ironic twist. With the discussion of domestic affairs heavily repressed, political energies were diverted to issues abroad. An average politically minded Chinese person knows much more about global geopolitics than China's domestic situation, the exact reverse of average Americans. American domestic politics, meanwhile, occupies a dangerous amount of attention for the Chinese; thus, many internalise the Fox-style cultural war framings. I am as speechless as I am alarmed every time I hear/read a Chinese call the American Democrats the

'far left', and take the 'risk' of their supposedly '108 genders' seriously. This does nothing less than globalise the American paralysis of political imagination. There are far more pressing problems domestically!

We should move beyond that and refocus on what's really in front of us. To fight something that does not exist is to facilitate its existence. For foreigners, to even entertain the American far-right's idea is to let a highly idiosyncratic framework, rooted in America's context, needlessly seep into our consciousness. Sure, fascists need to be publicly exposed, but the ironic distance of 'ridicule' and 'shaming' might dangerously turn into internalising their framing and agenda. This would risk cataphoric misjudgment of one's own political environment, treating one's opponents as ideologically aligned with a faraway fascist variant. There are certainly overlaps, but every right-wing sentiment is rooted in a specific context, often material or cultural predicaments specific to a society's own history. To misjudge this fact is to fight against an intangible spectre that materialises through one's insistence on fighting it, through fascination and identification with America and its rhetorical bigotries. Therefore, the non-American audience ought to treat this jubilee debate as a mere spectacle and never lose the distance of astonishment. They might then have enough energy to analyse and connect with their own communities to start changes.

Despite its spectacular nature, I am not suggesting this debate is worthless, if only because it's a symptomatic exposition of the

dilemma I outlined above. Nor were the topics completely out of touch. Raising the fourth claim on Gaza was courageous, though Mehdi's insistence that he's only debating 'ethnic cleansing' instead of 'genocide' came through as incredibly nerdy and unnecessarily meek. This claim was scarcely challenged due to conservatives' ignorance, barring some egregious claims on Palestinian children deserving death for being 'potential terrorists'. Many of the far-right were 'anti-Israel', but not for the right reason. I simply propose viewing it from an entirely different angle: outside vertically of 'establishment elites' and outside horizontally of 'America'. The reaction to this debate should not be a new heightened combativeness on behalf of Americans, but rather to reinforce the forgotten fact that America is but one context among many.

Above all, we must reckon with American peculiarities. It is time, fellow non-American, that we stop taking America as the archetypal 'politics' model for an open society and recognise its reactionary idiosyncrasy for exactly what it is. This point is of utmost importance. For every engagement of disputes within the American political context, we are following their agenda, thus gradually internalising their impoverished political imagination. To put it provocatively, we ought to provincialise America, not only its fascist fringes but the entire establishment spectrum and its artificial

binary of 'Republicans' vs. 'Democrats'. We, the rest of the world, whether Europe, East Asia, or the third world, ought to and deserve to aspire much, much broader.

Hongjing Huang

Student of History at LSE

Economic Individualism and Income Inequality: A Historical Perspective

Economic individualism could be defined as a belief system that interprets economic outcomes as primarily the result of individual effort and choice: it treats market pay as a fair signal and therefore prefers private over collective insurance, justifying a smaller role for the state in compressing incomes. Why is this belief system more present in some societies than in others? Such empirical regularity can potentially explain different attitudes that people have toward income inequality, defined as different levels of income enjoyed by society's members. A key aspect mediating the relationship between individualism and inequality are institutions – the formal rules, expressed by legislation and alike, that impose constraints on human behaviour.

In what follows, using examples from the UK from the year 1945 until today, I first propose that more individualistic economies, where the belief system of economic individualism prevails, are more likely to legitimise higher inequality than less individualist ones. Second, I claim that more individualist economies today are more likely to have higher levels of inequality in the future than less individualist ones, as the legitimisation of inequality follows a simple 'abide-by-the-market' rule: since inequality creates a divergence between the

ones at the top and at the bottom, inequality can characterise itself by high persistence and potential further growth, as the legitimisation of the economic individualism belief system manifests itself in those with high incomes securing their best interests.

One: More Individualism Means More Inequality

More individualism tends to raise inequality because it changes how individuals portray market outcomes, giving rise to institutions which effectively support higher inequality levels. When incomes are seen as the product of personal effort rather than state-facilitated risk-sharing, there is less appetite for insurance through taxes, transfers, and collective bargaining. Compare the post-war settlement with the liberalising turn after 1979, with the first government led by Margaret Thatcher. First, the Attlee-era architecture – National Insurance (1946), the NHS (1948), steeply progressive taxation and widespread wage-setting institutions that supported union strength – compressed the distribution both pre- and after-tax, embedding a solidaristic norm that relatively high-income dispersion was undesirable. Then, from 1979, governments explicitly re-centred responsibility

on the individual: the top marginal income-tax rate fell from 83% in 1979 to 40% by 1988; union power was curtailed via the Employment Acts (1980, 1982, 1988, 1990) and the Trade Union Act of 1984, while union density dropped from about one-half of employees in the early 1980s to roughly one-fifth today. By the same token, when bargaining shifts from coordinated to individual contracts, scarce skills and positions capture larger premium. Financial deregulation in the 1986 'Big Bang' and the broader wave of privatisations increased the finance wage premium and expanded top incomes, especially via bonuses. These shifts map closely onto the surge in top- 1% income shares from the late 1980s onward.

In short, an institutional regime that asks individuals to bargain alone and bear more risk in the marketplace, justifying a smaller than larger intervention of the government in the economy, predictably yields higher pre-tax dispersion and less post-tax compression, meaning higher income inequality. In other words, both Attlee and Thatcher saw varied justification

for either low or high inequality levels – those implied different institutions, making the portrayed inequality levels the reality.

Two: More Inequality Today May Mean More Inequality in the Future

More inequality today is likely to become more inequality tomorrow in individualist settings because market outcomes are

treated as fair signals that should be 'left alone', weakening both demand for and the political feasibility of income-equalising policy. In other words, once the portrayal of a given inequality level is considered legitimate, an individualist inequality regime makes it unlikely to delegitimise it. In the UK since 1979, this feedback is visible first in labour-market law: the Employment Acts of 1980, 1982, 1988 and 1990 (and later the 2016 Trade Union Act) that restricted collective industrial action supported a downward push of union density. That, in turn, reduced wage compression and entrenched higher income dispersion in subsequent decades, where, for the workers, who became increasingly less unionised, it was increasingly difficult to protect their interests. Moreover, the earnings structure tied to finance after the 1986 Big Bang meant that deregulation boosted the finance wage and bonus premium, increasing top-end labour income. As these gains were framed as deserved market rewards in an individualist narrative, coalitions formed to protect their best interests. They kept top tax rates relatively low and resisted measures, like stronger bonus constraints or more progressive income taxation, that would materially compress the distribution. In both domains – collective bargaining and high-income pay – the 'abide-by-the-market' logic ensures that today's wider income gaps reduce the incentive and political will to redistribute from top to bottom, allowing dispersion to persist and amplify into the future. In a high inequality regime, it

is easier for those at the top not to give away than for those at the bottom to fight for it.

In short, institutional regimes that support higher rather than lower inequality imply that, once the given inequality level becomes legitimised and socially accepted, it is difficult to reverse it. It should not come as a surprise that major downward inequality reversals have historically been associated with unexpected shocks such as wars or pandemics. Entrenched portrayals are difficult to reconfigure institutionally, yielding inequality regimes where the ones at the top do their best to protect their interests.

What remains to be answered is: how does one economy go from one institutional regime that justifies a given level of inequality to another? While the answer is likely to be complex, it clearly has to do with a change in inequality portrayal. Thus, while inequality is ultimately a market outcome – as it is a product of many decisions of multiple economic agents within the economy – it is also clearly a social one. It is the outcome reflecting what the society perceives as legitimate and just. An interesting dynamic, however, is that reversing high inequality may be substantially harder than making it happen.

Maks Łudziński

Graduate of MSc Economic History, LSE

MPhil, Cambridge

Research Assistant at University of Warsaw



How do you predict the future?

My tarot lady speaks with a thick Eastern European accent. She has hair that looks like straw, a rough face, and stubby fingers accented by colourful, painted nails. She performs her rituals – spells and predictions – in Russian, lending an air of mystery and authenticity to what might otherwise be called a con.

I first came across her on TikTok, where she had amassed around 50 thousand followers, a following built upon short videos of candlelit card readings. She calls herself a 'Tarot Guru', despite a slightly creaky website and a WhatsApp business account, listing prices from £60 to £250 per reading.

'If you come across this reading, this message meant for you' – is the phrase banded around on 'Tarot-Tok', the corner of TikTok filled with online fortune tellers offering just what you want to hear. 'You are about to make a million dollars, your dream job is just around the corner, and the ex you miss will be back tomorrow.'

The trend conjures up images of the opening scene of famed Nouvelle Vague director Agnes Varda's *Cléo de 5 à 7* (1962) in which the protagonist's fate appears to be sealed from the get-go when she visits a fortune teller, whose words set the course for the remainder of

the film. Psychologists might call this the Barnum effect, a tendency to believe vague, general statements as personal and prescriptive.

This 'new industry' of on-line tarot readers seems to have replaced the astrologers, political prophets, and agony aunts of days of old – Madame Arcati in a modern incarnation – with an emphasis on fate and divine timing, powered by algorithms.

Like many others, I was intrigued by this exotic world of fortune-telling and spells, seeking answers to complicated questions in the personal and professional spheres. Soon, I noticed friends also starting to follow this type of content, joking in messages: 'I wish TikTok would stop feeding my delusions'. Yet behind the humour lies a very real desire to know what the future holds.

After months of following this type of content, I noticed that a dark cloud could be cast over my day if the tarot lady pulled cards that didn't resonate with me – her prophecies didn't come true as promised, and her spells didn't have the desired effect.

The temporary comfort provided by a positive reading could easily be overshadowed by the anxiety and disappointment of unmet expectations. A dependence on such content can lead to a vicious

cycle of disillusionment: when the predictions fail to manifest, viewers are left feeling more lost and confused than ever.

This recent proliferation of 'witchy' social media content got me wondering: what exactly are we seeking with this kind of prophetic material?

In fact, the allure of online tarot is easy to understand. In an increasingly uncertain world of precarious markets and unresolved conflicts, prediction has become essential currency. While institutions and experts fall short on forecasting elections, tariffs, or ceasefires, alternative oracles fill the void, offering at least an illusion of clarity.

The mystical and arcane have always prompted a fascination, but the birth of the internet has turbocharged this interest. The addition of the instant gratification delivered by social media makes for a potent mix that is hard to resist.

In today's economy of attention, algorithms play upon an inherent human desire for security and certainty. Whether through trivial questions about daily luck, or bigger ones about geopolitics or climate, advice, projections, and outlooks often appear exactly when we are most receptive.

The often-theatrical presentations of age-old rituals like tarot readings, packaged into 60-second videos on platforms like TikTok and Instagram, create a sense of personalised insight, tailored to our inquiries, big or small. It feels intimate, personal, like fate. It feels real.

Not dissimilar to the new wave of AI chatbots, fast-becoming

Gen-Z's Mystic Meg. As of August 2025, Meta and startup Character.ai are under investigation by Texas attorney-general, Ken Paxton, over misleadingly marketing their chatbot as a therapy tool.

There's no denying the power of prophecy. Just as a horoscope or tarot reading can lead to changing behaviours, an economic forecast can influence investment. Be it from tarot gurus or Wall Street's models and metrics, we seek the same: the promise of accurate prediction. Yet both mystics and machines often stumble, and the future remains persistently unpredictable.

Whether it's the lifespan of today's AI summer or the possibility of lasting peace between Russia and Ukraine, uncertainty is the only constant. In the end, prophecy – like imagination – offers us a way to navigate the uncertainty that defines our lives.

Edie Twells-Eastwood

Journalism & International Affairs, Sciences Po

Nostalgia, Mythmaking, and the Politics of Work

Over the past fifty years, Americans have witnessed the rapid disappearance of blue-collar work. The decline of these jobs, which once offered economic stability and prosperity, coincided with massive growth in service jobs and gig work, like call centres, healthcare administration, and Uber driving. This breakdown has been key to the rise of far-right populist leaders blaming free trade, increased migration, and 'wokeism' for the collapse of the great world order. Donald Trump's slogan, 'Make America Great Again,' specifically relies on idealising past cultural homogeneity and utopian prosperity. Yet, despite Trump and his allies' narrative, American manufacturing jobs still exist. Recent data from the Bureau of Labour Statistics shows nearly 400,000 manufacturing jobs remain unfilled. This misalignment between nostalgia-driven populism and real labour market indicators echoes a nefarious historical pattern: when economic decline among working-class individuals reimagines itself with a national rebirth, policy drifts closer to an economics of fascism. As Trump and other populist figures profit from nostalgia, their policies leave no relief for the working class. Without supporting affected workers, both culturally and economically, prolonged disillusionment could rapidly

dissolve our ability to curtail rising authoritarianism.

There is no denying that Trump and his ilk are authoritarian strongmen, often using threats of state violence against dissidents, deploying the national guard against peaceful protestors, and denying free and fair election results. Applying the title of 'fascist' to Trump has proven stickier, partially due to the difficulties in defining the economics of fascism itself. Clearly, the fascism donned by Mussolini or Hitler hinged on authoritarianism and centralisation, where the state expropriated power from private individuals and corporations to consolidate its power. From this definition alone, it is clear Trump shares some qualities in common with the fascists—scapegoating, a cult of personality, and distrust of the elites—but fails in other essential respects. Most notably, Trump does not openly advocate for the expropriation of private corporations, but advances policies that weaken the government's ability to regulate, tax, and monitor companies.

However, reducing the economics of fascism to centralisation alone would also deny its basic premise. As Carl Schmitt argued, 'the specific political distinction to which political actions and motives can be reduced is that between

friend and enemy.' The politics of fascism are those of disruption—as Polanyi notes, 'irrationalistic philosophies, racist aesthetics, anticapitalistic demagoguery, heterodox currency views, criticism of the party system, widespread disparagement of the 'regime,' or whatever was the name given to the existing democratic set-up.' While Trump ensures large corporations announce their fealty to his regime, typified in the sycophantic pleas by tech companies to reduce their tariff burden, he has gutted the system of checks and balances: spreading 'birther' myths, dismantling the Consumer Finance Protection Bureau, threatening Jerome Powell, and pursuing a personal vendetta against the Biden family. These actions consolidate Trump's authority by criticising the 'elite regime' he is actively dismantling. Such grandstanding only works to deepen his followers' loyalty.

While Trump lacks some of the core policies put forth by fascist leaders of the mid-twentieth century, fascism is centred not on specific political aims. Instead, it defines itself in relationship to its charismatic leader and his followers. Whereas the old regime ignored these followers, the leader gives them a home. Policy is defined by a 'might is right' approach, culminating in what Roger Griffin terms 'palingenetic ultranationalism', the use of violent social revolution to cement control in the hands of one mythical hero rather than an (often portrayed as geriatric) set of elites. Under such a definition, Trump is not far off.

In the days after the 2016 US

election, the New York Times released a list of the '6 Books to Help Understand Trump's Win' (number two was, unsurprisingly, J.D. Vance's *Hillbilly Elegy*). This list reflected an effort among the college-educated to understand how half the country could support a reality TV star turned populist leader. Contemporary analysis had only begun to realise that deindustrialisation left workers behind, and desperate for a leader who they felt saw them. Indeed, economic analyses of midterm elections support that Trump's tariffs during his first term increased middle-American support for the Republican Party, while providing no boost to actual employment measures. What the Left had only begun processing, however, was that workers were not centred on economic policy, but a broader culture war borne of their perceived economic isolation. Whereas liberal and leftist politicians offered a binder of policies, Trump offered them a home, a movement, and a national rebirth.

This national rebirth is epitomised in Trump's iconic slogan, 'Make America Great Again.' This phrase, itself a quote from Ronald Reagan, is meant to harken to a bygone era of American life, a post-war golden age where men could support a nuclear family on a single income without a college degree. As opposed to today's America, this era gave men purpose. They found purpose in their work, even if difficult, and community amongst their colleagues and fellow Christian parishioners. Their wives appreciated their labour, felt joy in raising a family and gratitude towards their hus-

bands for making that lifestyle possible. They owned their homes and retired in their sixties. Whether or not this era ever existed (or for whom it existed) does not matter to Trump.

Although men were promised this dream, it is unachievable for most people today. Companies moved abroad, leaving industry towns to shrivel and disappear completely. Old, reliable jobs moved abroad while new jobs required a completely different skillset. For the workers who had planned their lives around the dream they were promised, there was no opportunity.

One of these trends, the loss of middle-skill jobs, like manufacturing and trade work, has been extensively studied by economists. Since the 1980s, workers in high-income countries have seen rising returns to higher education, a term economists call 'skill-biased technological change,' or SBTC. SBTC basically means that technology is used to make us all work better, but now it's only making work better for people with certain skills or levels of education. Surely, the technology introduced in the first half of the twentieth century rewarded the skills of secondary education—electricians need to know physics, salespeople need to know algebra—whereas technology today is geared toward college-educated workers. Most notably, computers are nearly essential and massively beneficial for workers in finance, tech, and other white-collar fields today, but they'd have little effect on the productivity of healthcare workers, plumbers, or service workers. As a result, workers in fields that require a college degree became more productive (i.e.,

lucrative) more quickly than those in jobs that required a high school degree. SBTC is often credited with rising income inequality since the 1980s, an issue only aggravated by the rising cost of undergraduate education in both the US and UK.

While white-collar workers were gaining from rising returns to technological progress, middle-skilled workers were simultaneously seeing the dissolution of worker protections, such as trade unions. Though manufacturing was already declining in Britain by the 1960s, Thatcherite and anti-union policies accelerated deindustrialisation dramatically, further disenfranchising the working class. The U.S. mirrored this trajectory under Reagan, whose assault on organised labour—from the breaking of the Professional Air Traffic Controllers Organisation in 1981 to targeted attacks to weaken collective bargaining rights—left workers with fewer tools to defend themselves against large macroeconomic shifts. In the past decade, the rise of the 'convenience economy'—things like Uber, food delivery, and other occasional work—has made gig jobs the norm. These jobs, while offering flexibility, provide no stability, unemployment pay, disability pay, sick leave, or any other employee protection. As union-protected jobs declined, they were replaced by increasingly unstable, lower-paid 'gigs.'

Meanwhile, foreign competition intensified these pressures. After Deng Xiaoping's reforms and China's WTO accession, U.S. manufacturing was no longer competitive on the global stage. Production shifted to factories in China,

Vietnam, and India, where labour costs were lower. This would have been impossible without advances in computing and decreased costs in global supply chains, which made it possible to split production across facilities, countries, and continents. Globalisation allowed producers to have factories anywhere, cutting down on expensive labour in countries like the US, the UK, and Germany.

Over the course of thirty years, the jobs that one generation of men thought would be their economic destiny were gone, and workers paid the price. Rising Chinese import penetration significantly decreased manufacturing employment throughout the US. And, as is probably intuitive to everyone except economists, workers can't easily find new work after their jobs disappear. Displaced workers persistently sort into lower-paid work, face lower rates of marriage and fertility, and experience higher mortality from drug and alcohol poisoning. As a result, vast swaths of the workforce are left to fend for themselves.

Trump is no friend to the working class. His policies do not advance any meaningful pro-worker reforms, such as reskilling initiatives, increased worker protections, or environmental policy. In fact, many of his policies explicitly harm low-income individuals. His tariffs will raise consumer prices without reviving manufacturing towns. His tax cuts overwhelmingly favour corporations and the very wealthy, while DOGE effectively gutted several agencies that help Americans find justice against financial fraud and abusive employers. His promis-

es of 'bringing jobs back' deny the reality that technological change and trade competition aren't going anywhere, while dismantling the few protections workers still have.

Trump cannot and will not deliver on his promises to recreate a robust working class. What Trump can deliver on, however, is the myth of rebirth—a fairytale about their future success, prosperity, and stability. Trump makes these workers feel seen after years of neglect from Republicans and Democrats alike. Poverty, to many Americans, is a personal failing—in the land of opportunity, you must have done something wrong to end up like this. In Trump's myth of America, it's not your fault. He can't provide relief, but he can provide a scapegoat—the immigrant 'rioting' in the street, the trans woman making your community unsafe, the Palestinian threatening American dominance in the Middle East. Trump unites through anger and ridicule. Standing against a united enemy, these workers become a part of a collective under the guidance of their hero.

By keeping workers focused on this myth, Trump distracts them from the economic reality—Trump isn't going to save them. When economic grievances are mobilised through scapegoating and authoritarian appeals, the door opens not to ordinary conservatism, but to a twenty-first-century fascism.

Trumpism isn't the only solution. Candidates advancing policies that meaningfully support the working class exist, and their base is growing. In the recent New York City mayoral primary, Zohran Mamdani defeated both the incumbent,

Eric Adams, and New York royalty, Andrew Cuomo. He didn't secure his win through his effective use of social media alone, but also through a focus on everyday economics. Mamdani focused on people's bottom line: the cost of housing, public transportation, and the price of lamb over rice at the food truck. Rather than promising people 'change,' Mamdani spoke to New Yorkers as if they were intelligent enough to decide for themselves. This political rhetoric, which centres on salient everyday economics, unites rather than separates.

The stories we tell ourselves matter. In Trump's narrative, the only solution to economic decline is a regression. Yet Trump knows it is impossible to restore the labour market to the one his base imagines. His obfuscating, hateful political rhetoric only serves to further disenfranchise workers while consolidating his own power. As his base slips closer to fascism, it is time to advance policies that meaningfully benefit workers, rather than leaving them in the past.

Mary Olson,

2024 Marshall Scholar

Graduate of MSc Economic History, LSE

MSc Economics, LSE

Research Assistant, CEP LSE

Money is a Good

Trade deficits and tariffs, those under-discussed and ignored topics, are again on my mind. This time, however, my attention is focused on pedagogy rather than contemporary news, because there is a vital component I once missed, which causes the entire topic to become confused.

Trade, more specifically, gains of trade, was the first model I learned as part of my undergraduate economic education. The twin theories of comparative and absolute advantage were elegant and intuitive, leading to the conclusion that trade could make countries richer. Yet in the years that followed, connecting these theories to real-world discussions around trade raised an insecurity. I could not draw the line from the theories of trade I had internalised to contemporary discussions around trade deficits—a conversation which in the US centred on China. Now, you, the reader, may well at this point have concluded that this misunderstanding was based on my own failings as a student, a perfectly reasonable conclusion and one which I reached. However, I think I failed in a predictable way, and I believe my failure can help others.

I failed to grasp the role of currency in international trade, and that misunderstanding rested on a flawed premise. Because we in-

stinctively frame international events in terms of everyday life, the outflow of dollars is often seen as a drain of wealth. The key insight is that, in international trade and economic transactions more broadly, currency is a good, just as cars, grain, and clothes are goods. When currency was bullion, this was easier to see. Today, fiat money and the ease of electronic banking have obscured the fact that money is itself a traded good.

One of the foundational teachings regarding money is that its utility arises because it allows us to trade it for other goods (stuff) without the constraint of a double coincidence of wants. Nonetheless, this should not be taken to mean that money is not itself a good. In the context of international trade, American consumers buying goods from China represents a trade, rather than a mere transaction—a trade of US dollars for 'stuff'. Chinese firms then hold those dollars, but since they cannot use them domestically, they face a choice. Firms (and banks) can either use them to buy American goods, or they can buy American financial assets. If Chinese firms choose to purchase American manufacturing goods, such as steel or oil, the trade balance will theoretically balance. If instead, these firms decide to invest in American financial assets, a trade

deficit will occur, thematically representing the American purchase of a foreign good with no corresponding sale.

Due to a variety of factors, US dollars are uniquely desired by foreigners. Critics of free trade often point to this foreign demand for US dollars as a culprit behind various American malaises, including the hollowing out of its manufacturing sector, which is forced to compete internationally with a home currency that is expensive to the rest of the world. These critics see the dollar's position as a form of 'Dutch Disease', an economic curse endowed by a plentiful natural resource. While there may exist more than a grain of truth to this explanation—although significant debate exists as to the extent of trade-induced employment effects—it neglects the variety of factors which drive the United States to absorb capital, as opposed to exporting raw manufacturing goods.

While the rest of the world significantly influences this equation, American choices are equally consequential. Over the past century, as we have grown wealthier, we shifted toward advanced sectors such as finance and software, leaning into new comparative advantages. The desire to invest in the United States is driven by a desire to reap the benefits of exposure to these technologies and gather yields that cannot be gained elsewhere. Dollars are valuable to foreign firms and banks because they allow them to collect these yields. At the same time, this influx is also the result of American domestic decisions to increase our borrowing and run larger budget deficits. Such shifts require

someone to lend to us (buy US treasuries), and this includes foreign entities. This increased demand for dollars pushes up the dollar and widens the trade deficit. Thus, the size of the trade deficit is at least partially determined by our own domestic budgeting decisions.

The purpose of this brief dispatch has not been to litigate normative arguments regarding the virtue of tariff policy but rather to provide a model framework that will better allow us each to investigate these questions. In my experience, trade is an area where ideological baggage often blends with analysis, and intuition falls short of capturing the dynamics at play. There are fundamental tradeoffs to global trade that deserve discussion, but the perception that imports represent a drain of wealth is the foundation for a great deal of mistaken analysis. Seeing money as a traded good rather than a vanishing asset lets us approach these debates with clearer eyes. If my early misunderstanding was predictable, perhaps it can also prove useful.

Lucas Mirani

**Graduate of MSc Economic History, LSE
BA Economics, UC Berkeley**

You Should Not Have an Opinion on San Francisco

My mother read the paper for local events, while my father watched CNN in the evenings for national news, which at the time usually concerned the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. Both my parents were politically engaged and held strong opinions about the state of the world. But perhaps, counterintuitively by today's standards, their views on these two different spheres often did not cross paths. Despite their ideological leanings, their opinions on the war in Iraq did not confirm their biases regarding the goings-on in the Bay Area. The local and the national remained distinct.

A primary reason for this fissure was how news was consumed; CNN focused on national and global politics, within the comfort zone of mainstream centrism, while local news focused exclusively on California and regional events. This model of news consumption has disappeared. Over the past two decades, social media and short-form video content, such as YouTube, have become the primary method of news consumption for younger generations. At the same time, we revealed our preferences, and local news has withered because we refused to pay for it.

The consequence has been a news ecosystem where local stories are neglected. In the mo-

ments when local news stories receive attention, it is usually through national news outlets and by stories that are likely to drive clicks—i.e., stories that can be mapped onto existing national fault lines. At the same time, barriers to accessing 'news' have disappeared as the world has digitised and globalised. Stories that, by definition, would have been local events in the past, as they were only available in local newspapers, are now broadcast across the world on TikTok and Instagram.

I have been fortunate enough to travel many parts of Europe, and when I reveal that I grew up near San Francisco, I am often met by polite curiosity, but also by judgment; not of me, but of San Francisco's perceived governmental incompetence. Frequently, this opinion is held by those who have visited San Francisco, but just as often, it isn't. I do not think this scenario is unique to me or to San Francisco. Our method of news consumption has become a giant game of confirmation bias, in which every event, no matter how local or how many miles away, is perceived to build upon and fit within existing beliefs. Easy access to information has made us more tribal and less willing to accept local nuances. Part of this change is that our opinions form

earlier and more rigidly than ever before. By the time American college students arrive at their dorms, they have likely had access to the internet for more than a decade and social media throughout their teenage years. This exposure to mass media means that, for many, their views have already ossified during a period in which self-interrogation and uncertainty were once held as virtues.

Mass migration, one of the great stressors upon today's politics, has revealed how this shift reshaped our discourse. While the issues faced by the UK and US vary greatly in context and scope, the underlying populist diagnoses and the political response have been consistent. Americans often see the UK's migration challenges not as distinct, but as a parallel to their own—and vice versa. There are no local stories anymore, only national ones, and global populist movements and grievance politics rely on the perception that the roots of our malaise are similar across oceans.

Migration is also far from the only area in which this change has amplified existing attitudes. American culture wars surrounding crime and social issues, such as 'wokeism', have become globalised. One striking moment is realising that much of the tribal Twitter content about U.S. domestic politics comes from people outside the country and from people who have likely never lived there. Bump into a global citizen outside of the United States and they will likely hold strong opinions on American politics, but not, as was once common, about foreign policy, but about domestic affairs.

I hesitate to end on a lament alone, rather than on a call to arms, buffered by a solution. However, pessimistically, I do not see easy answers to reverse the shift I have described. I believe the development of this change has been intensely damaging to our politics, but the forces of digitisation and our addictive need for confirmation bias seem insatiable. So, as a half measure, I'm going to forgo a broad policy solution and share the framework I have arrived at, which I try to individually operate under. We should all attempt to know less; uncertainty is a virtue.

Lucas Mirani

**Graduate of MSc Economic History, LSE
BA Economics, UC Berkeley**

How to Fight Fascism

The word 'fascism' has been thrown around thoughtlessly for decades, seemingly at the detriment of both intellectual rigour and the fight against it. All seem to agree that fascists are bad, but few have taken the time to explain who these baddies are and why they are so considered. This piece seeks to remedy this tendency and, in so doing, venture a counter to fascist tendencies.

What is Fascism?

The original fascist regimes and movements broadly seem to be united but feature two interlinked factors: the worship of a nation's fantastic(al) past and a pronounced utopianism.

The Worship of the Nation's 'past' requires an apt and romantic use of narrative to contrast a lost 'Jerusalem' with a decadent present. This isn't exactly the nostalgic feeling that some express at the loss of the character of their neighbourhood or town as time went on and changes occurred. Instead, it is something more akin to mythical storytelling, the likes of which exist in religious discourse. Fascist rhetoric harks back to a long-lost utopia for the nation where the grass was greener, the buildings were beautiful, and all lived a perfectly moral life in harmony with each other. This perfect, picturesque postcard of the

pre-modern era is then contrasted with the dirty, violent and decadent present. Such a juxtaposition is easier achieved when the lost utopia harks back to a past so distant that not only does nobody living remember it but also takes rigorous academic work to take the myth apart piece by piece. Hence, the Italian fascists of the 1930s appealed to the Empire of Rome as their utopia, adopting a salute falsely attributed to that society and ignoring all the privations non-citizens (who for a long time were the majority of the population) had to endure in comparison to contemporary Italy.

This imaginary utopian past then allows for the narrative of national rejuvenation to develop, whereby the present decadent society is to restore its supposed lost Jerusalem. Not unlike the Biblical Second Coming, whose plot is set out in the Book of Revelation, the narrative of this rejuvenation is one that involves temporary struggle on a national scale in order to reach utopia. As such, the wars for lebensraum and the persecution of political opponents, sexual minorities, artists and anyone who was not 'racially pure' were justified by the German National Socialists. Their imagined utopia, though reliant on an idealised past, was also characterised by a pronounced futurism. Indeed, from the lustre of atomic

energy and 'wonder weapons' to the dehumanising pseudo-sciences of race, a cult of 'science' was more than present in their ideology. The symbol of the National Socialist utopia, Welthauptstadt (world capital) Germania, was to be the perfect embodiment of fascism's ideal of a Frankenstein's monster between an idealised past and a futuristic society by ostentatiously flaunting the technical triumph of the German Nation through the grandeur of Neo-classical architecture.

What is interesting to note here is the underlying presupposition made when utopia is set out to be the goal. Chiefly, that the infinite good of an ideal society is worth a limitless price. Legal precedent and custom can be undone on command, institutions and historical rights can be overturned on a whim. In short, the process by which society is governed must submit itself to the utopian goal or be dismantled. The conjecture towards the goal, often led by some prophetic figure, thus trumps all other moral, legal and customary considerations. The ends are everything; the means are necessary. Historically, this has led to circumstances resembling Montesquieu's definition of despotism: the concentration of power within one ruler whose whims solely dictate government policy. There thus seems to be something quite revolutionary in this aspect of fascism. Customs and processes in democratic life, which serve to allow for pluralistic discussion, are seen by revolutionaries as either brakes to progress or enablers of the enemy. They are thus to be dismantled. That is not to say that all revolutionary

ideologies are fascist, but that fascism is revolutionary in its desire to overthrow an established order. In this way, Italian Black Shirts and the German SA started by intimidating opponents on the street. Interestingly, in the current political climate, it is not uncommon for groups of students with covered faces to censor speech which they deem 'Fascist', or *facho* as the French say, through interruption or physical violence. Indeed, some groups, like the recently dissolved 'Jeune Garde', actively intimidate and threaten political opponents.

In *How to Be a Conservative*, Sir Roger Scruton pointed out that all ideologies are dangerous in the sense that they promise what religion promises, a path to redemption for a society of true believers. It should thus come as no surprise that we have been able to link fascism with religious notions. It may, however, be surprising that we have been able to find its characteristics in movements that call themselves 'anti-fascist' (or 'antifa' for short), so actively defying what they see as fascism that opposition to it is their name's sake. That is, until we consider that individuals of these groups (usually derived from the political far-left) likewise seek the 'ideal' in ideology, only a different one based on 'equality', 'inclusiveness' and 'human dignity'. Of course, there is no consensus on what exactly constitutes 'human dignity', and the all-or-nothing nature of ideals makes their demands impossible to realistically satisfy. As such, they and other utopians can justify the transgressions of the rules and customs of a society's political pro-

cess in the name of 'the Revolution' to bring Heaven on Earth, like the fascists.

It should be noted here that we are not encompassing all movements opposed to fascism under the 'antifa' label. Though the history of the appellation 'Anti-Fascist' is one of a broad church formed in the final years of the Weimar Republic in order to oppose the rise of national socialism, current 'antifa' groups (like the recently disbanded Jeune Garde) are explicitly revolutionary movements that aim to suppress the rights of their ever-growing list of enemies in order to further their own idea of utopia. Anyone who stands in the way of their definitionally unreachable goals, from hard-right sympathisers to moderate social democrats, is labelled 'fascist'. Hence, the violent harassment of the centre-left French Socialist Party's stand during Labour Day protests this year by antifa flag-waving thugs in black shirts. As such, the question seems to be: What should be our answer in the face of utopian movements such as fascism? Is there a way of being anti-fascist without falling into the hands of 'antifa'?

What isn't Fascist?

This brings us to what fascism isn't. Indeed, now that we have established elements which characterise fascism, we may move into tendencies that might oppose it.

The defence of a state of being, rooted in historical precedent, is a tendency adjacent to fascism and all other revolutionary, utopian ideologies. Indeed, fascism's call on a fictitious past in order to create a perfect future is a far cry from the

defence of very real norms of living life in a manner established over generations. There is an inherent wisdom in the way things are done, assuming they result from centuries of evolution, in that they have integrated solutions to problems discovered through practice. We have already seen how utopians such as fascists justify the usurpation of the institutions of government; however, a word needs to be said about the customary institutions of day-to-day life. Like the political process itself, day-to-day customs can be seen as a threat to the progression towards the ideal society by a central state, for they represent the fact that the reality of a workable, organically constructed society does not conform to ideological considerations. The pub, which has long been seen as the meeting point of a whole society and where 'races', sexes and political orientations intermingle, is but an illustration of this fact.

If we accept that the defence of organic customs by definition opposes fascist tendencies, then we must accept that the defence of home can be so characterised. Home is a constructed place, not so dissimilar to Martin Heidegger's notion of 'dwelling', on which he elaborated in *Building, Dwelling, Thinking*. A home is a place whose present aesthetic and sensory experience is the result of it being passed down from generation to generation, each adding on their own piece while attempting to preserve something that is not only theirs but also their parents' and their children's. This is a place whose sensory experience exudes familiarity and that creates a sense

of belonging known to all those who know the scent of a family recipe or the tune of a childhood song. Most importantly, the place is not a work of fiction, an artifice of what should be. The place is real. The customs and traditions that characterise life in it are the sum of the day-to-day experiments run by successive generations of dwellers on the ways in which to reconcile their different needs, the advantages of community organisation and the land's particular challenges. This makes them part of the whole that is home. As such, there is emotional weight behind the preservation of the customs of a land, both overtly political and day-to-day, against the utopian tendencies of transgression and uprooting in the name of ideology. One doesn't wish to compare the ends of the following policy to those of fascism. Nevertheless, continued resistance to Sir Anthony C.H. Blair's fox hunting ban by British country dwellers, as well as their attempts to keep up the tradition of the hunt alive without killing the fox, in order to appease animal welfare activists, is proof of this homely attachment to customs

What Opposes Fascism?

Through all that we have said, it seems that the best way to counter fascism and its characteristics is to search for a doctrine that mobilises the attachment to home. That is where conservatism comes in. Sometimes described as the 'politics of attachment', conservatism in the Burkean sense has little to do with the theocratic interpretations of some. Instead, it is the acknowledgement of the aforementioned

wisdom of tradition as the sum of the experiments that have worked as of yet that Edmund Burke first theorised in *Reflections on the Revolution in France*.

A perspective adjacent to utopian ideologies like fascism, conservatism does not seek change to conjecture towards a goal or an ideal society. Conservatives are by nature sceptical of change. Being what Sir Roger called in *The Uses of Pessimism* 'scrupulous optimists', they first require individual changes to justify their necessity and then only accept them on the basis of the time's needs rather than in relation to an abstract goal. Through such a process, they temper the 'unscrupulous optimism' of utopians and allow for the transmission of what is rightfully preserved. This methodology is driven by a type of love that acknowledges that home is fragile. It has the humility to say that, as we owe what we have to our forefathers and as our descendants will inherit what we transmit to them, home is not ours to destroy in the pursuit of some chimerical utopia. As such, true conservatives observe and defend the customs and constraints of long-established institutions as they do the rites and rituals of everyday life. They denounce the transgression of those customs and constraints as they denounce non-overtly political, culturally divisive transgressions. They acknowledge that the system that allows for multi-party discussion is more important than one's political ends and that that system has its history with particularities that should not be overthrown by those who claim to have a perfect packaged demo-

cratic system.

As home is deeply sentimental in its nature, it is sometimes sublimed in art, such as in Robert Browning's yearful poem *Home Thoughts, from Abroad*. Some may thus contend that the 'home' is itself an ideal similar to those we have argued against in this article. I would, on the contrary, contend there is a difference between the two. The use of artwork to convey feelings of love and longing, which can be resolved through the contentment of home-dwelling, familiar to all those for whom 'home' is a known place, has little to do with the unresolvable revolt of utopians whose ideal can never be reached. Indeed, the difference is evident in the semantic distinction we just employed. 'Love', being the attachment to a known object, differs from 'revolt', which rejects the known in favour of a dream. Conservative love seeks to preserve what is, or in some cases, restore a known state of being as one restores a rustic tweed jacket, a delicate Victorian clock or an elaborate French Second Empire couch. Utopian revolt, on the other hand, seeks to destroy what it sees as a wretched state of being for the sake of what isn't.

Fighting Fascism

There is a fundamental question one should ask oneself when accepting the presumption that fascism is bad: Are its characteristics bad because they are linked to the name, or is the name bad because it is linked to certain characteristics?

In this piece, we have contended for the latter. Naturally, these character-

istics include the ideology's ends, which seek a type of undemocratic and exclusive society based on a fantastical past unique to the fascist imaginary. That said, the method by which the ideology establishes itself, that is to say, the quest for utopia, is one shared with other ideologies and is in and of itself a dangerous tendency as it justifies any means employed in search of Jerusalem. Against this, the rampart of conservatism seems to be the answer.

Tinahy

Ramamonjiarisoa

BSc International Politics, ULIP

Founder of ULIP Thought Forum

Can Scouts End Fascism?

In 2024, 21% of young men (ages 18-29) in Europe expressed support for far-right parties, relative to 14% of young women. In 2024, 56% of young men in the US voted for Donald Trump, relative to 40% of young women. In 2024, 45% of men in Brazil held a favourable view of Jair Bolsonaro, relative to 35% of women. What's going on, guys? Why the fascist vibes?

Theories abound - economic insecurity and inequality, cultural status loss, continued inculcation of sexist values, misogynistic online communities, and (dis)information ecosystems. Each of these explanations holds some truth, and collectively they point to a simple overarching trend: many men feel displaced. Their once clear mandate - win the bread! Make the decisions! Dominate the society! - is much murkier now.

And granted, it is discombobulating to have the rug that underpins your identity yanked out from under you, even if that rug was woven with the fibres of women's suppression and toxic masculinity. But some men have a solid floor beneath their rug, and the rug was simply an unsightly distraction; for others, the rug was their entire magic flying carpet. This metaphor is getting too elaborate - what I mean

to say is some men have been more resilient to the long-overdue equalising of gender power dynamics than others. Some men (the solid floor variety) embrace feminist ideals, openly seek therapy, are willing to explore their own gender and sexual identity, use their privilege to challenge inequality on behalf of others, etc. Others (the flying carpet variety) turn to far-right clubs.

These far right clubs promise a return of the glory days (often oddly evocative of days before women and minorities were enfranchised), the idea of the nation as a pure and unified community (where pure seems to be opportunistically defined as: straight male of the relevant dominant racial category), the valorisation of violence (see: January 6th), the pedestalizing of a strong (almost always male) leader. These clubs peddle belonging and status and a promise that the rug will be rapidly restored to its former position of fabricating a sense of security for you.

But what if there was a better club? A club that, for one, could actually deliver on its vision, and two, didn't have immense deleterious impacts on its own members and society at large?

Happily, such a club exists, and this club is Scouts. It exists

in many forms and goes by many names - The Scout Association in the UK, Scouting America in the US, Bund der Pfadfinderinnen und Pfadfinder in Germany - but the underlying purpose is the same: to empower young people to become responsible and contributing members of society. This club also peddles belonging and status (as anyone who has ascended from the ranks of a Tenderfoot to an Eagle Scout can attest to). But crucially, it helps young people - especially young men - build a genuine and resilient foundation of positive identity and values. Evidence shows that Scout participation is positively associated with democratic attitudes, higher social capital, greater community involvement, better mental health, and stronger empathy and acceptance towards a diversity of people.

(Sadly, no one seems to have done a randomised controlled trial or large-sample longitudinal study focused directly on the relationship between participation in Scouts and fascist vibes among men. Perhaps an enterprising reader can take that forward.)

Of course, Scouts is not the only good civic club out there, nor is it perfect - one of the values espoused on the World Scouting website is 'a Scout obeys orders of his parents, Patrol Leader or Scoutmaster without question.' Obedience without question starts to sound suspiciously like the other club. Nor are 'good clubs' a panacea - they don't solve elite capture of political systems that then leads

to extreme economic and social inequality, which provides kindling for fascism, for example. But they DO provide individuals with belonging and purpose, two things that are in crucial flux for young men right now.

It has often been said that the left, especially in the United States, fails to provide compelling alternative visions to the promises of the far right. So let us take inspiration from Scouts and offer the better club - a club 'rooted in the transformative ideals of equality, inclusivity, mutual respect, sustainability, harmony, and optimism for the future.' A club focused on building friendships, life skills, and positive self-regard. A club where your rank reflects how much you've helped others. With a club like this, we can end fascism before it begins.

Minahil Amin

MBA, Oxford University
Founder and Director of Wellspring Impact

Cheers, Santé, Prost, Kanpai

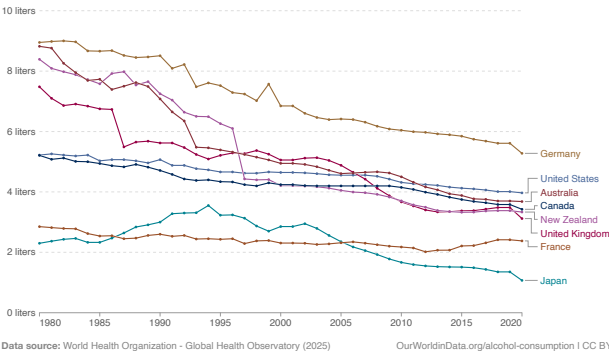
It's hard to argue that alcohol is good for you. Recent reports by the US's surgeon general (Because at least some of the US health care policy is led by science... for now) argued alcohol is the third leading preventable cause of cancer in the US, contributing to over 100,000 cases each year. And not only is it bad for you, it's bad for those around you. In 2023, the US saw 12,429 fatalities from drunk-driving instances, while the UK saw 250. And if hurting random strangers is not enough, the WHO estimates alcohol to be involved in 55% of all domestic abuse cases worldwide. Given such, why do we still do it?

The good news for us and those around us is that we've been doing it less, at least, within highly developed economies.

However, this has not been the overnight reduction one would expect after seeing its cancerous role – it's taken 40 years to not even cut our consumption habits in half. What's behind this sluggish reduction in intake? For one, path dependency certainly helps. For example, wine has been a cultural staple of both French and Italian cuisine for hundreds of years. As crazy as it sounds, French troops were rationed up to half a litre of wine each day during WWI. Furthermore, the British population would often drink

Beer consumption per person, 1980 to 2020

Average annual per capita beer consumption, measured in liters of pure alcohol. Beer contains around 5% of pure alcohol per volume so that one liter of beer contains 0.05 liters of pure alcohol. This means that 5 liters of pure alcohol equals 100 liters of beer.



Note: the trend exhibited by Japan peaking circa 1995 was seen by most of the other countries on the chart around 1960.

beer due to a lack of clean water sources. These sorts of things often don't vanish overnight (that is, unless the US president was known to visit your private island). And not only is it part of cuisine, but also our social lives. In much of the world, alcohol is used as a social excuse, a reason to meet up with old friends, to take a break from work, or simply to meet new people. For millennia, at least in the European world, alcohol has brought people together.

Are all the ramifications of reduced alcohol consumption good? I've seen a couple of sources out there that argue for a connection between the rising levels of loneliness in high-income countries, coupled with people having less sex, and decreases in alcohol consumption. To which I say – maybe. Given the aforementioned statistics on domestic abuse though, I urge caution on the alcohol-sex relationship. Further, while the loneliness-alcohol relationship may seem like a reasonable argument we must not jump to conclusions (Like the president of the US) and remind ourselves of the complexities of rising loneliness. Is it really the result of a reduction in alcohol consumption, is the internet to blame, or are both involved? So, before we make a hasty judgment, it would prove beneficial to use a more rigorous approach (Unlike the president of the US). However, if we want to get ahead of ourselves and assume a causal relationship between alcohol consumption and loneliness, the resulting implication, that alcohol is the only way we can socialise, is insane. To quote David Mitchell:

'Talking to my mom makes

me wonder, are we in denial about how much the way we've constructed our society relies on us spending our evening very lightly pissed?'

Our cultures, at least those of many who will be reading this, are structured around alcohol as our predominant way to socialise, to date, and to make friends. Surely there is a better way. Other cultures in this world have gotten along just fine without alcohol.

We've been granted every tool necessary to live without human interaction – this is terrible. We need one another. Isolationist behaviour helps no one (Regardless of what the orange dipshit in charge of the world's largest economy might say). Over history alcohol has brought us together. I see the appeal of blaming the loneliness epidemic on the reduction of its consumption. However, there must be a less destructive way of addressing this.

Now forgive me for cutting this short. but I must buy beer for a friends' going away party. Because God forbid, why would I want to remember that?

Cooper Lawrenz

**Graduate of MSc Economic History, LSE
Alcohol Enthusiast**

End Note

This fourth edition of The Free Forum encompasses a unified thread. The essays here contained demonstrate how fascistic narratives resurface in different guises. From the streets of Berlin to the feeds of TikTok, from nostalgia for a lost industrial age to the weaponisation of 'common sense', they offer a warning that the arrival of fascism is creeping and slow burning. It is not an easily defined, nor an easily recognisable phenomenon. It subconsciously persuades ordinary people that their very existence is dependent surrendering truth to power, where equality in itself is perceived as a threat.

Our present struggle for promoting truth over lies is beset by those who wish to tarnish and silence it. The result of lying over and over again is that sooner or later, we will not recognise the truth as what we once knew. But however many lies infect our world, the truth will always remain – buried under pretend stories. It exists whether it is wanted or not; whether it is seen or not. To surrender ourselves to fascistic rhetoric is to bury democracy until such a time comes for her to flower again. It is upon all of us to create a new story: one of equality without hierarchy, of belonging without exclusion, of futures not confined to mythic pasts.

Whatever the theme of

our next edition, your contributions remain our lifeblood. It remains imperative for us all to speak truth to lies, to continue writing, talking, and promoting empathy over hate. Whether you do this inside or outside The Free Forum, your voice will always be welcome here. Your work is no mere indulgence, it is the very thing that keeps free thought alive. Get involved; contact us at:

contactthefreeforum@gmail.com

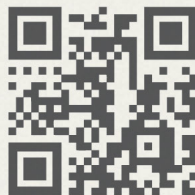
We hope to see faces both new and old next time we meet.

Conor Hatfield

**Communications and Outreach Officer
Graduate of MSc Economic History, LSE**



thefreeforum.co.uk



contactthefreeforum@gmail.com