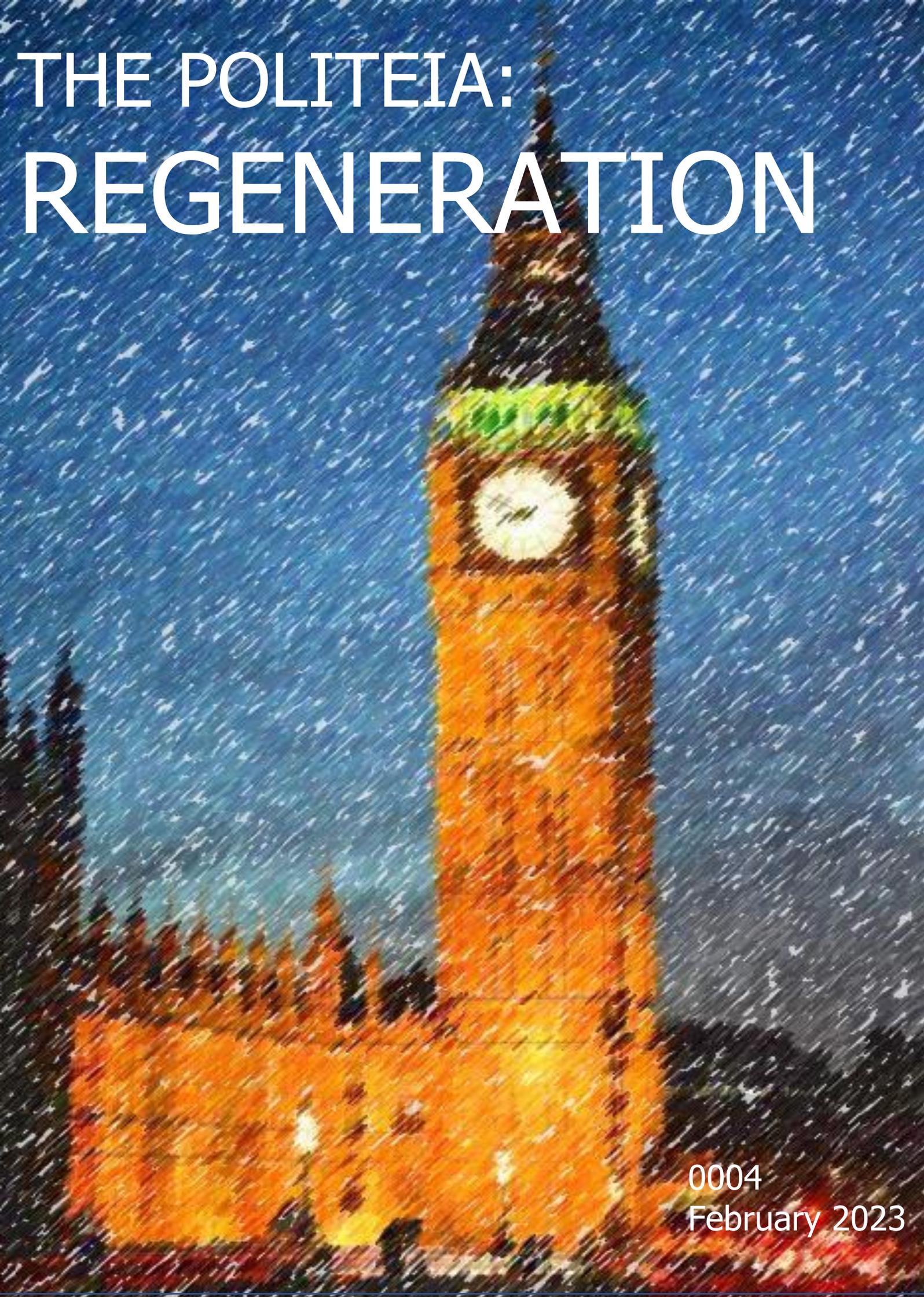


THE POLITEIA: REGENERATION



0004
February 2023

Foreword

Both written and edited by Sixth Form students, The Politeia was reintroduced in an attempt to break down the complexities of current affairs, acting as a guide with which students can navigate through the political world. Whether you are a political enthusiast or feel you are uninformed about the modern-day issues, The Politeia caters to everyone. Academic, engaging, and politically diverse, the first edition of this editorial is the fruit of the determined labour of all the students involved.

We plan to release issues from this point on at the start of every half-term and we will always be looking to feature new writers in our future editions, especially budding year 11 students who are passionate about politics and can carry on our legacy after leaving the school. We can only hope that 2023 will offer the same calibre of news stories that 2022 did, with countless political scandals, repeated government U-turns, numerous strikes and protests etc. and all of the students at The Politeia are excited to report on the ever-changing political climate.

On behalf of all those involved, we hope that you will enjoy what will be the first of many editions of *The Politeia: Regeneration*.

A special mention must go to both Dr. Meddelton and Mr. Ormonde for their ongoing teaching of current affairs and sustained encouragement of Wilsonians to better engage with politics. We would also like to thank Mr. Lissimore for his help in restarting The Politeia.

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A tall, modern building with a blue glass facade and a row of international flags at the bottom. The building's facade is composed of a grid of blue-tinted glass panels. At the base of the building, a row of flags from various countries is displayed on tall poles. The sky is clear and blue.

Worldwide

Qatar World Cup 2022: The Pinnacle of Football or a Human Rights Catastrophe?

By Ivor Alberto

To some of you, politics may lack that certain *something* that would otherwise engage you as a reader; there is no doubt that the political narrative can be a complex one to follow as both on the domestic front and within international affairs; news stories come thick and fast. However, through The Politeia, we wish to break down the barrier that is the complexity of the political world; in doing so, we hope to show you that politics is closely intertwined with our daily lives, hence why political engagement is so important.

In the first article of The Politeia, I would like to explore a theme that I hope is familiar to you, the Qatar World Cup 2022, and how politics has become the main focus of what is supposed to be the biggest sporting event in the world, watched by millions of people across the globe.



Ras Abu Aboud Stadium, Qatar in construction phase (IQ News, 2022)

From the moment FIFA named Qatar as the host of the 2022 World Cup in 2010, a small Arab nation with a ghastly record of human rights violations, particularly concerning the treatment of migrant workers and laws on homosexuality, there was worldwide outrage. Whilst this anger slowly subsided, for the 2022 World Cup was twelve years away at the

time - far in the future, so it seemed - it has returned in the wake of the Qatar World Cup. (Indeed, for good reason).

In preparation for the World Cup, Qatar ordered the construction of eight different stadiums to accommodate the myriad nations (32) competing at the tournament, as well as one hundred new hotels and extensive investment in infrastructure, regenerating highways, creating a new underground that stretches across the nation and building new roads. Now, Qatar relies heavily on immigration, with migrant workers comprising 95% of the country's workforce in various sectors - therefore, it is no surprise that tens of thousands of migrant workers were involved in the World Cup provisions. This is not an issue in itself, however, the treatment of migrant workers is the underlying reason why footballing fanatics are firmly opposed to Qatar having been awarded the World Cup. These migrant workers often arrive in Qatar in search of improved working conditions, jobs offering better pay or are simply driven away from their home country as their homes have been ravaged by conflict. Several reports have highlighted the exploitation of migrant workers by Qatari forces, taking advantage of their naivety and financially unstable background to force them to work long hours - often up to 18 hours a day, for minimum wage - 1,000 riyals, equivalent to just \$275, and in abject and unsanitary working condition.

The Guardian's extensive reportage covering the horrid situation of migrant labourers over the last decade revealed that 6,500 migrants, primarily of South-Asian origin (India, Nepal,

Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, and Pakistan) had died in Qatar since the nation was awarded the football World Cup back in 2010. The Qatari government responded by saying that many of these deaths did not come as a result of these people's involvement in World Cup-related projects; it also argued that those who died had worked in Qatar for several years, and their cause of death could have been due to old age or natural causes, as opposed to labourers' working conditions which the media suggests; indeed, Qatari officials have claimed that its accident reports, although inaccessible to the public, proves that there were only 37 deaths amongst migrant workers at World Cup construction sites, only three of which were 'work-related'. The International Labour Organisation, however, an UN-governed agency that seeks to protect workers' rights by setting international labour standards, rebukes the Qatari argument, stating that '37 deaths' is a stark underestimate because Qatar does not count deaths caused by respiratory failure and heart attacks as 'work-related', hence why they are not included in the aforementioned statistic, even though these are both common symptoms of heatstroke, which stems from excessive workloads in scorching temperatures. Yearly average temperatures in Qatar range from 14 °C to a staggering 41°C.

However, days before the opening match of the tournament, Qatar versus Ecuador, FIFA President Gianni Infantino wrote to the 32 participating nations, pleading with them to ensure politics did not infest the Qatar World Cup – in his letter, he wrote, **“We know that football does not live in a vacuum and we are also aware that there are many challenges and difficulties of a political nature around the world. But please don't let football be dragged into any ideological or political struggle there is.”** This came in response to several major footballing nations announcing that they would be sporting rainbow-coloured armbands to demonstrate support for minority groups, in a country where homosexuality is illegal and punishable by

death. Following Infantino's ineffective letter, FIFA threatened to issue yellow cards to players for wearing such armbands; consequently, the national football federations of the Netherlands, England, Wales, Belgium, Switzerland, Germany, and Denmark issued a joint statement announcing they were backing off, saying that they did not want to put their players 'in a position where they could face sporting sanctions'. Wanting to reconcile with participating nations, a compromise was later found, with FIFA allowing team captains to wear a 'NO DISCRIMINATION' armband from the start of the group stage.



England captain Harry Kane sporting the 'NO DISCRIMINATION' armband (Getty Images, 2022)

Whilst Infantino was somewhat justified in wanting to establish a barrier between sport and politics, in a speech delivered during the first World Cup press conference, Infantino raised headlines for all the wrong reasons. Consider this section of Infantino's *hour-long* monologue:

“Today I have very strong feelings, today I feel Qatari, today I feel Arab, today I feel African, today I feel gay, today I feel disabled, today I feel a migrant worker... Of course, I am not Qatari, I am not an Arab, I am not African, I am not gay, I am not disabled. But I feel like it, because I know what it means to be discriminated, to be bullied.”

Whilst Infantino may have meant his words as a gesture of solidarity by expressing an affinity with the plight of powerless minority groups, instead, he came across as derogatory and crass. He goes on to compare his own childhood experiences of bullying for his red hair and freckles to the exploitation of migrant workers in Qatar, which again, although perhaps words of sincerity, appear flippant and dismissive of migrant workers' horrid treatment.

For marginalised groups with little economic and political power in the global sphere, the World Cup is perceived as a holy grail, a rare opportunity to force an issue onto the global stage and make the world take notice. This is true both for marginalised racial and ethnic groups within developed nations, and for economically disadvantaged countries in the global arena. For example, against FIFA regulations, a group of supporters displayed a 'FREE PALESTINE' banner during the Austria – Tunisia match, referencing the ongoing Israel-Palestine conflict which has gone underreported in the media due to the mass popularity of the World Cup 2022; this has sparked other fans to do the same, with Israel-Palestine-related banners now becoming commonplace in stadiums.



'FREE PALESTINE' banner displayed during the Austria – Tunisia match (Samantha Lewis, 2022)

Perhaps, to some extent, our judgment of Qatar for their questionable human rights record (to say the least) is somewhat

unwarranted – especially when previous World Cup host nations, namely South Africa (2010) and Russia (2018), are guilty of numerous human rights violations. For example, during the 2018 World Cup held in Russia, at least 21 migrant workers died in stadium construction, according to the June 2018 report by Building Workers International – the report stated that many of these deaths were due to “falls from heights or because of heavy equipment falling on workers,” incidents that could easily have been avoided had health and safety precautions been adhered to. In another low during the 2018 tournament, investigative article *Josimar* documented that at least 110 North Korean forced labourers worked at the Zenit Arena in St. Petersburg, and published this information in a piece entitled 'The Slaves of St. Petersburg'. Likewise, prior to the 2010 World Cup in South Africa, authorities used any means necessary to remove homeless people and street traders in the area surrounding World Cup stadiums, including tear gas and manhandling civilians.

Therefore, clearly, Qatar is not the sole perpetrator. It is human nature to perceive the most recent developments as the most significant, hence the mass controversy surrounding the Qatar World Cup 2022. However, if we reflect on the tournament's history, we should see that almost every host nation has been engaged in political controversies which have made us question the legitimacy of the decision to grant them the World Cup.

Iranians Call for a Regressive Return to the Authoritarian Pahlavi Monarchy

By Edward Pocock

In August 2022, the 84-year-old exiled Iranian queen, Farah Pahlavi claimed that the people of Iran "want the return" of the Pahlavi monarchy, and that she was ready to go back home. She and her husband Mohammad Reza were overthrown in the 1979 Iranian Revolution, and forced to flee Iran. They were replaced by an Islamic theocracy, establishing a supreme leader of Iran (currently Ali Khamenei), ruling with the help of his Islamic jurist Guardian Council, and a 'democratically elected' president. At the time, the Iranian people claimed the revolution as a victory for social justice, freedom, and democracy. Thus, one would naturally conclude that the pariah queen Farah Pahlavi is delusional, expecting to be welcomed with open arms back into the country she and her husband (now deceased) were forced to leave. Although, in Iran, surprisingly, there seems to be popular agitation for the return of the monarchy. In a recent survey, 39% of Iranians supported the return of the monarchy, and 64% admitted to having favourable views of the last Shah - it seems the Iranian people have a soft spot for the man whose regime their parents helped to depose.

This hotly debated issue has recently re-emerged after the death of 22-year-old Mahsa Amini, which sparked a wave of mass uprising in Iran against 43 years of tyrannical rule under the Islamic theocracy. For the first time since the 1979 Iranian Revolution, there is unity between the often-divided ethnicities in protest against the current regime. As part of the protest, women have burned hijabs, strikes have taken place, and Iran's football team refused to sing their national anthem at the World Cup in Qatar. Despite widespread solidarity, and the peaceful nature of the

protesting, the security forces have responded violently, and currently, 458 people, including 63 children have been killed, and more than 18,000 people have been detained. These protests, despite being provoked by the death of Mahsa Amini, seem to be representative of widespread repugnance for the current regime, and desperation for regime change.



Demonstration in support of Amini in Istanbul (Getty Images, September 2022)

But why are the Iranian people so desperate for regime change? What is so problematic about the Islamic Republic of Iran?

The hijab was made compulsory in 1983, and the current president Raisi began ramping up policing of women's dress after becoming president in 2021. The Guidance Patrol was established in 2005, with the task of arresting people who do not comply with Islamic dress code, although, as of 7 December 2022, they have been ostensibly abolished. Most Iranians are also pro-western, whilst the current government is vehemently anti-western. The Iranian authorities continue to heavily suppress the rights to freedom of expression, association, and assembly. The Iranian authorities have

also banned independent political parties and trade unions, censored media, and jammed satellite television. The government's authoritarian tactics don't end here, and they continue to discriminate against women and girls, members of the LGBTQ+ community, ethnic minorities, and religious minorities. The authorities' response to Covid-19 was marked by a failure to ensure timely and equitable access to Covid-19 vaccines, after the Supreme Leader's decision to ban vaccines produced in the UK and USA. The death penalty is used widely, executions have been carried out after unfair trials, and there are cases of people as young as 15 being sentenced to death.



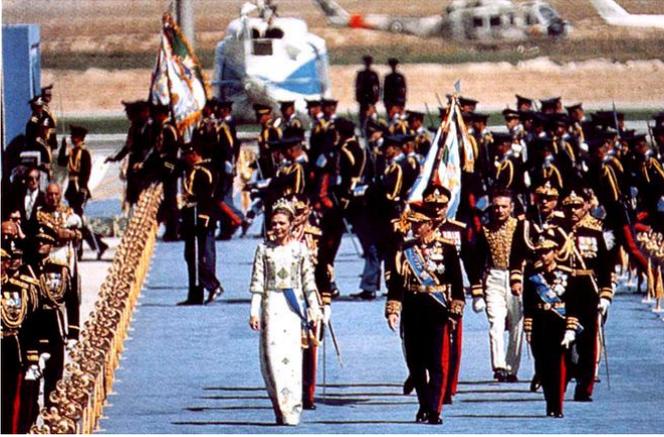
President Ebrahim Raisi (Getty Images)

There is also an economic crisis in Iran, caused mostly by the Iranian government's policies. The US dollar can now buy more than 40,000 rials; compare this to 1978, before the Islamic Republic was established, and one US dollar was equivalent to only 70 rials. The new low value of the rial means that the average worker's salary has fallen to approximately \$100-120 a month, and reports recently spoke of people exchanging household goods or personal items for food. The Iranian authorities have also faced criticism from environmental experts, due to their failure to address Iran's environmental crisis, characterised by desertification, water pollution from raw sewage, and deforestation.

Considering the current state of Iran, it's unsurprising that the Iranian people are desperate for regime change. Yet, from a western perspective, it's understandable to be confused about why the Iranian people would ever want the return of an authoritarian and dictatorial monarchy. Mohammad Reza was the last king of the Pahlavi dynasty, he became king in 1941, and was overthrown in 1979. But what was life like under his almost 40-year reign?

After replacing his father in 1941, Mohammad Reza was certainly more lenient on labour movements, protests, and demonstrations; he also brought the Majlis (Iranian parliament) back into the political sphere, and sought to exploit Iran's bountiful oil supplies. Mohammad Reza successfully nationalised Iranian oil in 1951, angering the British, who greatly profited (considerably more than Iran) from Iranian oil extraction. Despite attempts from Britain to destabilise the monarchy by paying Iranians to protest and imposing economic sanctions on Iran, the people continued to wholeheartedly support the Shah. The Shah further increased cooperation with the west, and with the assistance of the USA, he proceeded to carry out a national development programme, known as the 'White Revolution'. Mohammad Reza expanded the road and rail network, eradicated malaria, and established a literary corps and a health corps for the large but isolated rural population.

However, the Shah faced continuing political criticism. The majority of the Iranian population remained impoverished, as inequality was exacerbated by the Shah's policies. The Shah's immense wealth and the multi-million dollar parties he threw were insulting to the Iranian people, who often lived without access to basic necessities. Moreover, the Shah was criticised for isolating religious leaders, and disregarding the role of Islam in Iran, in a move towards western secularism. Overall, opposition to the Shah himself was based on his autocratic rule, corruption in government, and the activities of the secret police (SAVAK) in suppressing dissent and opposition to his rule.



One of the Shah's characteristically extravagant parties

"Reza Shah, God bless your soul," was a chant (amongst many others) heard during the recent protests in Iran, and many anti-government protestors were seen brandishing the 'Sun and Lion' flag of the old Iranian Empire. It is clear that the Iranian people want their country restored to 'greatness', and after 2,500 years (give or take a century) of Iranian monarchy, many Iranians believe that their country's greatness is bound up with its monarchy. Regardless of his many imperfections, the Iranian people see the Shah as the man who pushed Iran from a country in the Stone Age to a more productive, westernised, inspiring, and modern nation.

It seems the Iranian people's perception of the Shah has been tainted by their detestation of the current despotic regime, and a lack of viable alternatives. More than 60% of Iranians were born after the Revolution, and will have no experience of living under the old Iranian Empire and the great poverty that it brought with it. However, Iran has only ever known authoritarian rule. A leader is necessary to bring about lasting change, and to capitalise on the abundance of passion and engagement from Iranians across social, ethnic, and regional divides, and the Iranian people have a predisposition to favour a central leader over any other alternative.

When considering the situation in Iran, it is difficult not to adopt a haughty perspective; westerners have a habit of sitting on their democratic high horses and contemptuously sneering at the dictatorial chaos in the Southern Hemisphere and the Far East. It is understandable to be taken aback by the suggestion of the return of the Pahlavi monarchy in Iran. Who would willingly accept being ruled by an authoritarian monarchy? Yet, the situation is clearly more complex, life for Iranians was undeniably better under the Pahlavi monarchy, and democracy seems not to be an achievable alternative. Thus, the lack of viable alternatives certainly seems to point to the return of the monarchy, although, from a western perspective, this very idea is anathema. Hence, it seems apparent that the solution to the problems in Iran may not be the solution that the west wants, yet there remains one thing we must bear in mind – westerners have been proven particularly bad at offering solutions to problems in the Middle East, but that is perhaps a discussion for a later date.



Iranians protesting with the "Sun and Lion" flag (flickr)



UK

The Rise of the Labour Party: Labour's Vision for the Future

By Ivor Alberto

In June 1972, five members of CREEP, Committee to Re-Elect the President, were arrested for breaking into the Watergate offices of the Democrat Party to plant bugging devices – all as a means of guaranteeing a Republican victory in the upcoming 1972 US presidential election, with President Nixon at the helm. Instead, the rather poorly-executed plan ended in failure: the five burglars were arrested, put on trial and imprisoned, whilst Richard Nixon himself was forced to resign from his position, issuing a *non-apologetic apology* to the American public, not only for the forming of CREEP but for repeatedly denying involvement in the scandal as part of an attempted cover-up. The Watergate Scandal, nice and simple.

May – June 2020. A political scandal, but this time on the home front. Whilst citizens were forbidden from leaving their homes as per government guidance, the very people who imposed these restrictions were regularly gathering in and around Downing Street – for Boris Johnson's 57th birthday party for example (a clearly pressing matter), as well as humble get-togethers arranged by senior members in the Cabinet. There are certainly parallels between the Watergate scandal, and what is now known as the Partygate scandal. First of all, both scandals had reverberating consequences in the political world – they greatly undermined people's confidence in politicians, and make it difficult for the public to trust the words of their elected representatives. Second, those guilty tried tirelessly to hide their involvement as a means of preserving their hitherto untarnished reputation, even resorting to lying and shirking responsibility. Indeed, following an investigation into the scandal

by the Metropolitan police, Dominic Cummings, Boris Johnson's former aide during his Prime Ministerial tenure, called Johnson out on account of him claiming that he 'had not realised' a "bring your own booze" party involving around 100 staff was a social gathering in violation of public health regulations. And finally, these scandals never end well for the political parties to which those found guilty belong. In the case of Nixon, whilst he was succeeded by Gerald Ford (*Republican*) until the end of the fixed four-year presidential term, Jimmy Carter, a *Democrat*, replaced him. Perhaps this is a sign of things to come. With the 2024 general election fast approaching, it is looking increasingly likely that the balance of power will shift in favour of the Labour party, and thus Sir Keir Starmer will step up to the Prime Ministerial role.



Former PM Boris Johnson in attendance at a gathering. The others guilty were made unidentifiable by Sue Gray in her report on the scandal

Yet, it is not fair to say the fall of the Conservative party is solely due to Boris Johnson and the role he played in the

Partygate scandal. The root of the problem, yes, but not entirely to blame. His immediate successor, Liz Truss, is also at fault – for obvious reasons. Undoubtedly, the coronavirus pandemic devastated the domestic and international economies, so this was not the ideal stage for a newly-appointed Prime Minister to step onto. However, the credit that can plausibly be given to Truss and her administration (albeit very little) stops there. Simply put, every economic policy that she implemented to repair the country from the economic aftermath of COVID-19 was poorly suited to the situation the country was in at the time. Her promises to restore the country to its pre-pandemic state and more turned out to be nonsensical, and instead, Truss has played a role in plunging the UK into an inflation spiral with no signs of emergence in the foreseeable future, as well as bearing partial responsibility in bringing about a cost-of-living calamity. Indeed, out of desperation, Truss even reopened the discussion regarding shale gas extraction, or fracking, in a feeble attempt to combat soaring energy prices – another poor decision to add to the copious collection.



Truss' first speech to the nation as the new Prime Minister (*The Labour Spokesman*, 2022)

This decision shows either a clear disregard for the grave environmental ramifications of this decision, such as the contamination of groundwater supplies, habitat displacement, the production of methane, a highly potent greenhouse gas, as well as having been the cause of minor earthquake tremors in the

past (2011), or simply a rash move which demonstrates a stark inability to cope in the prime ministerial role. No wonder Truss holds the title of the shortest-serving Prime Minister in British history! As aforementioned, the fall of the Conservative party paves the way for another political party to take the helm – and the Starmer-led Labour party is currently in poll position. So, let us imagine that the Labour party does indeed win the upcoming election. What is their vision for the future of the UK?

In recent months, Keir Starmer has given statements at various political conferences regarding what to expect from his Labour party. Arguably the most striking promise is to abolish the House of Lords, the 'upper chamber' of the bicameral Parliament, and replace it with an elected chamber. Currently, members of the House of Lords, or *peers*, are not elected by the public. There are two types of peers residing in the Lords: life peers, characterised by their experience or expertise in a particular field, or hereditary peers, who inherit their title from their predecessors. Starmer vows that radical reforms are needed to reinstitute people's faith in the democratic process, thus giving the second chamber a greater sense of purpose; however, he clarified that the functions of this rejuvenated body would not overlap with the functions of the House of Commons, remaining a second chamber charged with scrutinising legislation. Following the announcement to abolish the Lords, Starmer told Labour peers that there was now strong support for reform of the Lords, both across party lines and amongst the general public.

Furthermore, Starmer has also set out his plans for modernising the NHS, a healthcare system in a state of disrepair and in need of urgent reform. For example, ambulance services are seeing unprecedented levels of demand post-Covid, with 860,000 calls to 999 made in England in April 2022, up 20% on the previous April. Furthermore, due to staffing pressures, A&E department waiting times have risen far beyond the NHS' four-hour target; as emergency departments become

overcrowded, ambulance services are forced to wait with ailing patients until space becomes available, hindering their ability to respond to other patient requests. Next, the UK has one of the lowest numbers of beds per head in Europe, an insufficient critical care capacity that has been a crucial factor in creating patient backlogs; the easing of lockdown restrictions has exacerbated the problem of patient backlogs across all areas of healthcare provision, one that is, again due to staffing inadequacies, yet to be neutralised. Lacking beds has, in turn, led to greater patient waiting times and waitlists, thus putting pressure on NHS medical professionals to compromise safety for efficiency. As you can see, this intricate web of hitches has placed severe strain on the NHS.



Labour leader *Sir Keir Starmer* vs Prime Minister *Rishi Sunak* (Jessica Taylor, 2022)

In a statement earlier this year, Shadow Chancellor Rachel Reeves announced Labour's intentions to reintroduce the highest rate – the top 45p rate – of income tax, which in turn would raise the revenue required to execute an NHS resurgence by addressing issues that, thus far, have been neglected by the Tory-led government. The proposal included doubling the number of medical places to 15,000 a year, training 5,000 new health visitors a year, and creating 10,000 more nursing and midwifery clinical placements each year – all policies that seek to resolve the issue of staff shortages which has been burdening the NHS in recent years, but has been exposed by the coronavirus pandemic. Labour's plans also include capital investment in equipment, such as IT, and

new NHS premises, pledging £2.7 billion dedicated to the construction of six new hospitals and boosting the salaries of NHS staff.

In recent Prime Minister Questions (PMQs), Starmer has also attacked PM Rishi Sunak over private schools, such as Sunak's own Winchester College, claiming charitable status – a Starmer-proclaimed "scandal" which enables private schools to avoid charging VAT of 20% on school fees. Starmer has promised that if the Labour party are voted into power, they will end the tax breaks afforded to private schools which will raise an estimated £1.7 billion a year – a sum which can instead be invested into state schools to reduce the gap between private and state school education.

Finally, Starmer has pledged to commit to implementing pay rises "at least in line with inflation" across the public sector, and introducing a £15 per hour minimum wage to "avoid the steepest drop in living standards since the 1950s." This is contrary to his Conservative counterpart Sunak, who is point-blank refusing to negotiate with trade unions in order to prevent further strikes that are crippling the public sector. However, importantly, Starmer is yet to reveal how he intends to fund these boosts in pay and increase in the minimum wage, a sizeable hurdle which could prevent the Labour party from putting this policy into motion if and when they are elected into power.

This article has painted the picture of an overwhelming Labour victory in the 2024 general election, and the current opinion polls tell a similar story, however, it is never this simple. Sunak appears to have stabilised the domestic economy and is slowly repairing the wounds inflicted by Trussonomics; therefore, it will take a valiant effort by Starmer and the Labour party to break through and seize power from the Tories. Nevertheless, through the discursive manifesto explored in this article, you will now have some idea of the Labour party's vision for the future if they do indeed win the 2024 general election.

In an Age of Partisan Warfare and Identity Politics, has 'Wokeness' Lost All Meaning?

By Edward Pocock

"The woke mind virus is either defeated or nothing else matters." The impassioned words of Elon Musk were well received by more than 600,000 Twitter users who chose to like the viral tweet; however, many others were left perplexed - unsure of what exactly Musk meant when referring to this "woke mind virus." Is it that Musk doesn't even know himself what exactly 'woke' means, and his tweet was simply a means of provoking culture war? Or does this term 'woke' sufficiently define a societal threat from the left, corroding our right to freedom of speech, and dividing us via identity politics?

match how DeSantis uses the term, which includes labelling the following things as 'woke': Ben and Jerry's ice cream, Disney, and even maths textbooks! It seems infeasible that the man championing the "Stop W.O.K.E Act" (which plans to give businesses, employees, children, and families the tools to fight back against 'woke' indoctrination) would not be able to offer a suitable definition for the term he throws around repeatedly. It seems, therefore, that 'woke' is a convenient term used to describe anything and everything DeSantis dislikes, but this is unhelpful in deciphering Musk's cryptic tweet, and understanding what exactly the "woke mind virus" is.



Elon Musk tweets that the "woke mind virus" must be defeated (Getty Images)

In a recent court case, Ron DeSantis's lawyers were asked to define this term. DeSantis (the Governor of Florida) had previously suspended the state attorney Andrew Warren, accusing him of being 'woke', and when asked what exactly he meant by the term 'woke', his lawyers clarified that the term referred to "the belief there are systemic injustices in American society and the need to address them."

This definition, however, certainly doesn't



Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis at the Conservative Political Action Conference, 24 February 2022, in Orlando

Perhaps the current UK Home Secretary, Suella Braverman, can help to solve this problem (although it would be a historic first). Braverman chose to brand HR as 'woke' earlier this year, hell-bent on purging government departments of diversity advisers, and scrapping diversity and

inclusion training for government employees. As part of her recent “war on woke,” Braverman praised Liz Truss (remember her?) for “working hard to fight pernicious identity politics,” claiming “Britain needs a lot of things but it certainly doesn’t need ‘woke’ commissars policing our thoughts.” Braverman, similarly to DeSantis, has criticised “woke indoctrination;” she expressed disapproval of the idea that all ethnic minorities are impacted by white privilege, and labelled the ‘woke’ idea that ethnic minorities are impacted by structural racism as “left-wing political ideology.”

why use this term if it’s so problematic? Surely denying structural racism isn’t winning her any votes? Perhaps in the interest of preserving the status quo, the term ‘woke’ is a handy tool used to smear her political adversaries, therefore preventing political progress for underrepresented groups, and preventing serious societal problems from being addressed.



Suella Braverman speaking about her “war on woke”



The anti-woke agenda

Belief in the existence of structural racism is by no means “left-wing ideology,” but Braverman seems to equate anything she dislikes with the political left; hence, this term ‘woke’, appears to be a reactionary jab at the left, despite many of the ideas being opposed by the ‘anti-woke’ not being synonymous with left-wing ideology. What Braverman seems to be opposed to is progress - whether she is opposing equality training, criticising efforts to address structural racism in the police force, or condemning identity politics, what Braverman is really opposing (whether consciously or unconsciously) is progress for underrepresented groups in society. In Braverman’s use, the term ‘woke’, is a cheap ‘one-liner’ used to attack the left; she knows it’s an easy way to get a headline, and it is apparent that this term is problematic. But

Although we cannot answer these questions without identifying who exactly this ‘woke’ opposition is - who is this ‘enemy’ who Elon Musk, Ron DeSantis, and Suella Braverman have decided poses such a serious threat to society? Whilst Braverman has helped to give some insight into what ‘woke’ means, and why this term is used, a precise definition for the term is still unclear.

In a final attempt to define this term, it seems sensible to turn to the Daily Mail, the newspaper with a section on their website tailored to ‘woke culture’. Recently, the Daily Mail reported on a bakery owner, Paul Cook, who faced harsh criticism from a plethora of ‘anti-woke’ Facebookers for selling ‘non-binary gingerbread people’. The Cottage Bakery, based in Blackpool, was blasted online for promoting a ‘woke agenda’, one user posting: “Absolute madness. Won’t even be able to call it gingerbread soon in case it offends gingers.” Paul later admitted that the whole thing was only a joke, and was bemused by the great number of people who were angry about gingerbread that doesn’t have a gender.

The great overreaction to this situation gives

some insight into what the average Facebooker sees as 'woke' - policing other people's actions and words, opposition to personal freedoms (such as freedom of speech), and being too easily offended. However, this particular story was entirely overblown, and the 'anti-woke' Facebook warriors' farcical response to what was essentially a dad joke, highlights a certain hypocrisy within the 'anti-woke' movement. That hypocrisy being that they are the ones policing other people's words and actions, they are the ones opposing personal freedoms, and they are the ones who are too easily offended. In a paradoxical turn of events, is it that the 'anti-woke' are actually the most 'woke' of all? Are they their own worst enemy?

their rights to be respected, and underrepresented groups in society. However, it is important to point out that this may not be the intentions of some of the 'anti-woke', and it is possible to sympathise with many of the 'anti-woke' warriors, who oftentimes misunderstand the transgender and structural racism issues in society, and are victims of misinformation, and confirmation bias. So who should we blame?

We should blame the politicians who equate 'wokeness' with anything and everything they dislike, we should blame the tabloids who push this harmful 'anti-woke' agenda, and we should blame Elon Musk, the man fearmongering the "woke mind virus." (Although, unsurprisingly it's not the first time virus-related misinformation has circulated on Twitter).



The Cottage Baker owner in Blackpool causes stir online for selling 'non-binary gingerbread people'

Ultimately it is becoming apparent that 'wokeness' as a concept doesn't really exist. Instead, this term 'woke' has morphed into a throwaway insult from those on the political right, and older generations, used against anything and everything they see as too progressive, or that suggests the existence of firmly established societal prejudice. Whilst the 'anti-woke' may believe they are fighting a war against those who seek to curtail their freedoms, and those who plan to indoctrinate them with 'woke' dogma, this is not the war they are fighting. Instead, the 'anti-woke' are fighting a war against the victims of institutional racism, trans people who want



USA

addressing gerrymandering, including *Davis vs. Bandemer* in 1986, announcing gerrymandering as constitutional, despite being in violation of the Equal Protection Clause. This is because, historically, gerrymandering was used to weaken the vote of racial minorities to reduce their influence on the political landscape. Further legislation proliferating the expansion of gerrymandering came into place in the US in 2019, with the Supreme Court ruling that federal courts could not intervene or make decisions during disagreements over new electoral boundaries.

Proposed solutions include dividing districts of voters using a committee of independents (people not aligned with, or at least biased towards, a political party) to redraw the boundaries. However, this has the potential for bribery and coercion which would not solve the problem. Another solution could be to make sure a bipartisan decision is made, with both parties agreeing on newly defined borders. Despite this seemingly reasonable answer, incumbent politicians would draw boundaries in a way that favours their re-election, creating a lack of competition from the other side.

While more prevalent in the US, examples of gerrymandering still exist in the United Kingdom. For example, as recently as 2021, conflict has arisen regarding the electoral map of the United Kingdom. Owing to a Conservative plan, propositions were made to reduce the number of seats possessed by Wales and Scotland (losing 2 and 8 seats respectively) with these being gained by England. These changes would lead to fewer constituencies in the Midlands, as boundaries would be redrawn to allow for the greater populated areas in the South to have better constituency representation. These proposals were condemned by Labour, accusing the Conservatives of 'gerrymandering'; however, some constituencies were voted upon by 50,000 people and others 100,000. Though it would decrease the influence of areas nearby central London, unlike in the US where it is used as more of a blatant tool for political

domination, it would still ensure all people's votes count.

Overall, the results of an election ought to represent the percentage of a state who support a party and its candidates and not have the votes of thousands of under-represented groups of people entirely disregarded and with the election rigged to favour one side. Evidently, gerrymandering obstructs democracy. This is not a one-party problem and has been abused by both the Democrats and Republicans throughout history to obstruct the opinions of the groups either of them oppose from influencing the House of Representatives. Solutions to this problem do not lie in exploitative two-party cooperation or dishonest and potentially deceitful committees that collect cash from the hands of political donors. Instead, the US ought to use an algorithm, such as one created by Harvard Professor Kosuke Imai and PhD candidate Corey McCartan to detect gerrymandering, to create non-partisan maps that favour neither political side. With more equal representation of both parties in each district, swing voters will have more influence in elections, with the campaigns of either candidate having the potential of swaying the vote.



Harvard Professor Kosuke Imai and PhD candidate Corey McCartan

Hostility, Voting, Silence, Noise and Pernicious Polarization: Why the Two-Party System Fails

By Haider Chauhan

I hung up my politically-and-morally charged boots at the end of 2022- after both a begrudging acceptance of general one-liners like 'Live like it's your last day' and 'Politics is just an echo chamber of self-assuring liars', and a recognition of how I care too much about such things. And life was running smoothly. However, after watching an American political riot (Capitol) on YouTube, I noticed something interesting about American politics recently.

There was a popular phrase having done the rounds on the increasingly political app of Twitter, and other social media, after January 2021- along the lines of 'We didn't vote for Biden, we just didn't vote for Trump'. This hatred for the other side has been an utter side effect of the Two-Party System in the US- and more specifically the surging illiberalism of the Republican Party. The Republican party has become much more right-wing and restrictive over the past 6 years- including the overturning of Roe v Wade, the 'Muslim Ban', effective ban on asylum and ban on transgenders in the US Armed Forces. Repeating the word 'ban' has genuinely given me a headache but it's indicative of the Republican party's shift to extremity and authoritarianism- not to mention the Republican riots at the Capitol. This is even more clear from a V-Dem Institute study. In this study, a party's commitment (or lack thereof) to democratic norms prior to elections in different countries was measured.

According to the study, the Republican Party has more in common with the dangerously authoritarian parties in Hungary and Turkey than it does with conservative parties in the UK or Germany. This rampant bombast of restriction and illiberalism will only lead to

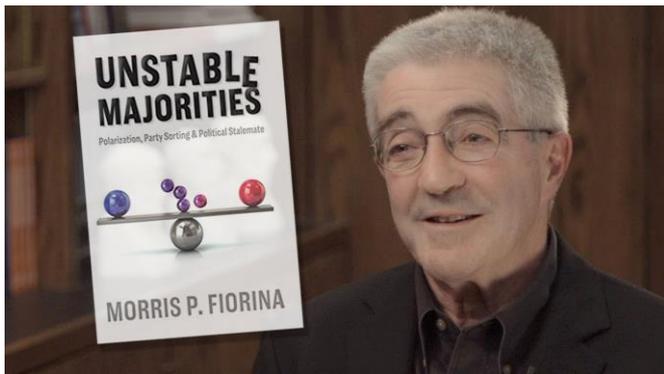
extreme views being the norm- and the elimination of the moderate on a macro scale. This will only lead to self-destruction for, best case the Republican party, but worst case, the democratic system as a whole.



Another inherent problem with Two Party Systems is that it leaves an entire country at an ideological and progressive stalemate. The US can be seen as an anomaly in this, but since this is about US politics I'll stick to the matter at hand. It is incredibly clear to see the rapid radicalisation of both the Democratic party and the Republican party- no better exemplified than by the abortion debate: 2020 Democratic policy saw abortion be a human right and made freely available, while 2020 Republican policy saw abortion bans after 20 weeks. No matter how you feel about this issue, the fact that 75% of Americans fall in between these two relative extremes is interesting: it means that the sharp polarization of these two political behemoths has only led to minorities aligning with the parties' positions- and the majorities voting for one or the other by marginal preference or trivial reasoning. These voters

tend to hop the figurative ship whenever the party they voted for last time is in power. Why does this lead to nothing getting done? Great question, it's because no party can achieve convincing control of US institutions for any practical period of time- almost directly due to centrist-like voters switching teams in every mid-term/ House election.

This is discussed in Fiorina's book 'Unstable Majorities'- where such phenomena are mentioned, alongside the point that the extreme changes in legislation and government policy every four years alienates the moderate voter. The vote for the other side, almost becomes a vote to steady the boat as opposed to a vote for a better future. So, nothing ever really happens- and the US climate becomes more a fight for a two-year transient control than a fight for legitimate change for longevity.



The notorious Two-Party System perpetuates pernicious polarization at the largest scale. What is pernicious polarization? In layman's terms, it is the Us vs Them mentality. The mentality that we, the members of _____ (insert one of two parties) are the radical saviours of the US- and the other side is full of villains and barbarians. This might not seem that harmful- it seems to eliminate radicalism and entice continuous healthy competition. However, anyone saying that would have an incredibly forgiving definition of the word 'healthy'. The election has become almost a sports match where winning is all that matters, especially while each party see the other as the God of Destruction and the other's success as a suicidal loss to the US. This ideology is simply a spawn of pernicious polarization, and the grandchild of

extreme ideas on both sides of the horseshoe. A very recent example of this ideology is the undermining of the democracy of the United States manifesting itself in the Capitol Riots.

Make no mistake- this is not just a right-wing issue, as similar reactions on a smaller scale happened in Trump's historic victory in the 2016 generals. This not only undermines democracy- but due to the drastic nature of these rebellions, these reactions also undermine the US constitution and, in turn, the US. The very country both sides are trying to resurrect. From an outsider's perspective, the Great United States seems to be a cesspool of caged minds with blue name tags charging with all their strength into caged minds with red name tags. The real saving grace of the political system, which seems to have been ignored recently, is the fact that both sides are, really, fighting for the same thing- American prosperity. But when this is forgotten, and it becomes 50% of voters vs the other 50%- despair and instability is the only logical conclusion.

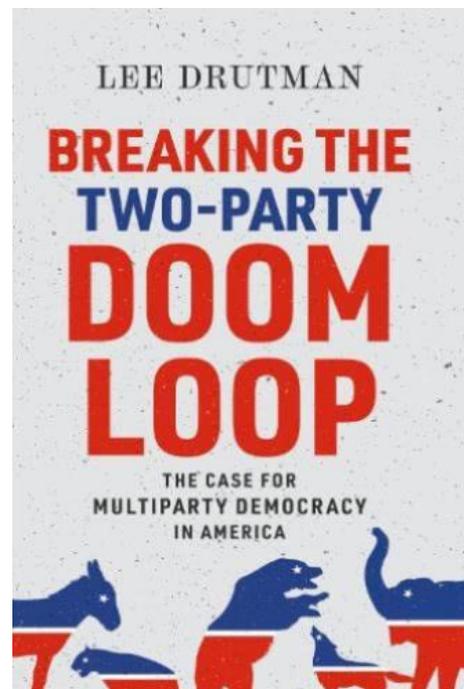
The Two-Party system isn't just a social trainwreck- it is also a historical one. The founding fathers despised this system- as shown by this quote by John Adams: "a division of the republic into two great parties... is to be dreaded as the great political evil." George Washington, the first president of the United States, warned against hyper-partisanship: "The alternate domination of one faction over another, sharpened by the spirit of revenge, is itself a frightful despotism." The genuine anger between these two factions goes against what America has stood for: as shown by the fact that 25% more Democrats and Republicans think that those on the other side are immoral, lazy, dishonest and closed-minded.

Lee Drutman, a pioneering political scientist, writes in his book 'Breaking the Two-Party Doom Loop' that "All voters must align themselves with one vision, given only two viable choices. This makes it harder to register ambivalences and different opinions altogether." He is completely correct. The Two-Party system, excludes any third party

from even being a valid alternative for any voter that wants change. This is because, since these two giants have taken territory for both sides of the horseshoe- and due to their deep-rooted histories and constituencies, no other party will have a sliver of a chance at winning. This wipes a moderate view from contention- and so warps public opinion and the country's policies. Such an effect brings us to a similar conclusion as earlier: votes to steady the American Titanic as opposed to creating proper change and progress.

It is understandable that this stance on the Two-Party system may incite some criticism- such as 'The Two-Party system makes law-making easier', 'The system places restrictions on how extreme popular views can go, due to their bottom line being to win over the mostly moderate public' and 'it speeds up the governing process'. These are ostensibly sensible claims- however, the American political climate has probably disproved every one of those claims, and they only seem to make sense theoretically. However, the argument that the 'first past the post' election system perpetuates the excesses of Two-Party systems makes sense to me. For example, the fact that any party that receives over 50% of the votes wins a general, and so both the Democrats and Republicans can have faith that no other party will be considered seriously by voters. This is because there is no chance that those parties would stand a chance of winning due to the deep histories and influences of these two parties. They now can indulge in their own extremes as it's either a vote for them, a vote for the enemy or a wasted vote. If both these systems are changed, there is a chance to stop the deterioration of American politics. A solution could be the AV system, or Alternative Vote, along with the need for a 2/3 majority- where voters list their preferences for office. This would have its drawbacks, but this would lead to an opening for other parties and ideologies- especially centrists and parties that have focuses on certain issues i.e., the environment. Step one will always be dismantling the perpetuations of these systems. Because, if else, there will be no incentive for parties to change.

The truth is, America will relish in polarization, and the hatred of the other side no matter the number of voting systems promoted or criticisms presented. Because power is enshrined in negativity and influence, especially political power in a place where subjective opinion is built with bricks of objectivity. But after seeing the consequences of every voter's fears of the other side coming to power, to the point that democracy and free speech is undermined- we see that change needs to be made. Or else.





Thank You