March 2026

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THE PERSPECTIVE

Magazine

SINCE 1963

After the End of History

Rupture. Resistance. Reinvention

Editors' Note

The fireworks at the beginning of 2026 marked not only the turn of a calendar, but the start of a new quarter of a century. Yet the mood felt different from the optimism that once surrounded the close of the twentieth century. The idea that history had settled into a predictable path has faded. Instead, the past 25 years have reminded us that change rarely follows a straight line.

This is the spirit behind this issue: *After the End of History—Rupture, Resistance, Reinvention*. We look at unfinished revolutions and ask what remains when the headlines move on. We explore how markets have become arenas of geopolitical competition, how digital power reshapes influence, and how movements once full of momentum can lose their appeal. We reflect on the resurgence of assertive nationalism and on the growing urgency of climate governance in a world that feels both more connected and more fragile.

This is the only issue produced solely by UPF this year, and we wanted it to feel meaningful. It brings together different voices, perspectives and formats, but also highlights something simple and important: collaboration. We are especially pleased to republish three pieces from our Webzine, giving printed form to work that usually lives online. Moving these articles from screen to paper is a small but tangible sign of the shared effort that connects the branches of The Perspective Media.

We are equally proud to feature two photojournalism projects shot entirely on analogue film. In the early 2000s, film photography was widely considered finished, replaced by digital speed and convenience. Yet renewed interest in recent years has brought analogue production back to life. There is something quietly fitting in that revival. In an era dominated by feeds and constant updates, analogue photography asks us to slow down, to look more carefully, and to sit with what we see, perhaps, in a more human way.

As we step into this new quarter century, we do so without easy certainties. But perhaps that is not a weakness. It is an invitation to stay curious, to question what we once assumed, and to continue the conversation together.

Sincerely,

Olivia and Filippo

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EDITORS-IN-CHIEF
Filippo Fioretti Boccato
Olivia Lindgren

SUB-EDITORS
Tara Srikkanth
Erik Norinder
Emmie Eklund
Ebba Westerlund

DESIGN & LAYOUT
Filippo Fioretti Boccato

COVER PICTURE
Igor Saikin
Unsplash

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Olivia Lindgren

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About UPF Lund

Since 1935, The Association of Foreign Affairs in Lund (abbreviated to UPF from its Swedish name, Utrikespolitiska Föreningen) provides a space for those interested in exploring the world of politics and foreign affairs. UPF's official language is English.

UPF President's Address

Dear Readers,

As we reflect on the first twenty-five years of the twenty-first century, it becomes clear how profoundly the world has changed. New geopolitical realities, technological advances, and global challenges have reshaped international affairs and the way we understand our role within it. In times like these, spaces for discussion, curiosity, and critical engagement are more important than ever.

UPF Lund continues to be one of those spaces. Over the past semester, our members and committees have worked tirelessly to organise events, produce thoughtful publications, and create opportunities for students to engage with global issues. These efforts reflect the dedication and enthusiasm that define our association. I would like to extend my sincere thanks to everyone who contributes their time and energy to UPF Lund. Your commitment makes all of this possible.

Looking back, we can be proud of what our community has achieved. Each lecture, publication, event, and discussion contributes to our broader mission: encouraging students to explore international affairs and to engage with the world beyond Lund. Looking ahead, as the global landscape continues to evolve, UPF Lund will remain a place for new ideas and new voices.

Building on what has already been accomplished, I'm excited to see us continuing to grow and strengthen our community throughout the remainder of the operational year.

Enjoy your reading!

Ella Hellerup

Ella Hellerup | President of UPF

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After the End of History

Hanna Simona Allas | Opinion

In 1989, the US-born political scientist Francis Fukuyama wrote an intriguing essay titled 'The End of History?' in which he tried to make sense of the new reality the world was facing. As the Soviet Union was showing signs of collapse, thus making the Cold War wage its last ideological battles, Fukuyama sensed that something significant was about to happen, or more specifically, was about to stop happening. He predicted that history—mankind's constant struggle for ideological hegemony—had come to an end.

Fukuyama argued that while there would still be political events and conflicts between nations, the "unabashed victory of economic and political liberalism" had made it unlikely that any political system could rival the "universalization of Western liberal democracy" in the future. Communism and socialism in its various forms had proved themselves unfit for the modern age, and fascism had been defeated on the battlefields of World War II. Thus, Fukuyama saw no room for any more major political shifts and concluded that history as such was going to end with the arrival of the 1990s.

The first major cracks in this theory appeared after the September 11 terrorist attacks in 2001. The following year, in his State of the Union address, President Bush introduced the "axis of evil" narrative, making it clear that a with-us-or-against-us war of ideologies was underway. Fukuyama did not give up on his theory, and labeled the terrorist attacks as a security issue rather than an ideological battle. He also insisted the Bush administration was 'overreacting'. However, this raised a question whether or not much of history—that Fukuyama had predicted an end to—had been formed by moments exactly like this: humans over- or underreacting in fear, grief and anger. Could it be that Fukuyama failed to consider the wild card in any carefully crafted theory: human emotion?

Marble Clock on the former Prior building at Kamenne Square in Bratislava | by Chen Jinghui

Furthermore, this may not have been the only thing that Fukuyama missed. A trigger for a strong emotional response also occurs when the environment around us is becoming hostile in other ways. Amid an accelerating climate crisis, access to natural resources, whether for survival or for creating long-term competitive advantage, has become the primary driver of conflict. Control over rare earth minerals, renewable energy reserves, and fossil fuels will determine which states will have the strongest position to shape the rest of the 21st century. To secure this position, critical infrastructure and fertile land will be guarded, and if necessary, fought over.

One could, of course, argue that these kinds of conflicts would not necessarily need to be ideological, and that liberal democracy can still prevail. However, the core issue with that statement regards an important historical lesson: while democracy is arguably the most just and humane form of governing, it often fails to provide tools for dealing with crises and anxious masses of people. Fighting over resources may not be caused by ideological differences, but it may make people receptive and even expectant of ideologies that emphasise the idea of belonging and strong leadership. These ideologies may also prioritise rapid decision-making that may negatively impact marginalised groups and favour the belief that 'might is right', thus, offering an alternative for the current democratic system.

This is well-illustrated by the ongoing rise of the far-right political parties in Europe, a response to, at least partly, security and immigration concerns, as well as economic discontent, including rising energy costs. Global markets and diplomatic alliances have been shaken with Trumpist tariff-policies which target historical allies of the United States as much as its direct competitors. What is more, this all takes place on a backdrop of Ukraine fighting the Russian full-scale invasion, President Donald Trump issuing a heavy intervention with the Venezuelan government and threatening to push through "a deal" to take control of Greenland, and ongoing tensions in Taiwan regarding China.

The red thread running through these examples is —although not limited to— a fight for resources, be it natural energy sources, including oil and gas, rare earth minerals, agricultural land and/or production capacities (e.g. of microchips). Furthermore, these situations have had a much wider effect: as a result of heightened security concerns, Finland, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, and Poland have moved to withdraw from the Ottawa Treaty, one of the key pillars of the rules-based international order. Furthermore, the Hungarian government has used their veto power to obstruct EU decision-making on critical issues, while maintaining closer ties to Russia, exposing vulnerabilities in the EU's consensus-based system.

Thus, the 'universal Western liberal democracy' seems to be under continuous threat, both in Europe as well as in the United States. At the same time, growing tensions regarding limited resources, tumultuous weather conditions, unsatisfactory immigration policies, and a race for obtaining control over sustainable energy sources, seem to be turning ideologies not into potential end goals of social progress like Fukuyama proposed, but tools for gaining something valuable, often at the expense of someone else.

Thus, even though liberal democracy might (and hopefully will) still prevail, it will not do so without struggle. As long as members of humankind stand face-to-face with uncertainty and feel their basic needs (access to food, heat and drinking water) being potentially unmet, liberal democracy will always be threatened by populist movements and authoritarian regimes. Therefore, looking at Fukuyama's essay in 2026, it seems that history is far from being over. In fact, some of history's most defining struggles may still lie ahead.

Fighting over resources may not be caused by ideological differences, but it may make people receptive and even expectant of ideologies that emphasise the idea of belonging and strong leadership

The End of Independence? How Europe's Two Biggest Independence Movements Lost Their Allure

Leo Elfors & Olov Loyd | Analysis

Joseph2 | Borders Europe Map | Wikimedia Commons | CC BY-SA 4.0 | (Modified from Original)

Throughout the 21st century, two European independence movements have risen to political prominence and then lost much of their momentum: one in Catalonia and one in Scotland. Both seek independence from their respective states, Spain and the United Kingdom, have deep historical ties, and share themes of tactical miscalculation and missed opportunities. Yet, the ways in which the movements were brought down differ significantly, revealing contrasting approaches to managing secessionist pressure in contemporary Europe.

The Catalan independence movement, which seeks independence of Catalonia from Spain, has historical roots stretching back centuries, with modern political nationalism growing stronger in the mid-1800s. However, the contemporary phase of the movement is largely a phenomenon of the 21st century. During the early 2000s, Catalan nationalists largely pursued a more moderate position compared to earlier, focusing on expanded autonomy rather than outright secession. This more moderate position enabled negotiations and, later on, an agreement between the Spanish government in Madrid and the semi-autonomous government of Catalonia in 2006, which in turn led to a further divestment of powers to the 'Generalidad de Cataluña'—the Catalan parliament ruling the autonomous community.

That accommodation, however, proved fragile. In 2009, the Spanish constitutional court declared some of the statutes in the agreement illegal. For many Catalan independence activists, this symbolised the limits of what could be achieved within the existing constitutional order. Protests followed, and support for independence increased the following years. Frustrated, Catalan independence activists took to the streets in protest of the decision.

Thus, a confrontation between the steadfast establishment in Madrid and their equally steadfast Catalan adversary began to seem inevitable. In 2017, the Generalidad de Cataluña passed a bill allowing an independence referendum, which then passed. Despite heavy criticism, the Catalan parliament voted yes to independence—although the result ended up being heavily skewed due to the social

and political controversy. The Spanish government responded forcefully by revoking Catalonia's autonomous status, thus putting it under direct government control. Moreover, arrest warrants were issued for key figures involved in organising the independence referendum and subsequent declaration of independence.

In the years following the (failed) referendum, the Spanish political landscape has undergone a noticeable shift concerning Catalan independence.

In the 2024 regional Catalan parliamentary elections—in contrast to a decades-old tradition—parties against independence won the election with 54% of the vote.

Several factors help explain this development. Public opinion surveys point towards the rise of a new generation of Catalans—including young Spanish-Catalan people as well as immigrants from other countries and other parts of Spain—who no longer see any value in pursuing independence. Additionally, a large part of the population identifies as both Spanish and Catalan, suggesting a rise of dual identities. At the same time, the firm refusal of Catalan independence by the Spanish government and the Spanish courts may also contribute to this shift. Although the Sanchez government has begun pursuing a policy of detente towards politicians involved with Catalan independence efforts, it has simultaneously refused a vote on independence itself.

Moving north, the Scottish independence movement—which has long been a thorn in the side of many governments in Westminster—presents a parallel but distinct case. Similarly to the

Masha Gladkova | Protests in Catalonia, Spain | Flickr (via Wikimedia Commons) | CC BY 2.0

Catalan case, the Scottish independence movement rests on deep historical foundations. Until 1707, Scotland had been an independent kingdom, but through the Acts of Union in 1707, the Kingdom of England and the Kingdom of Scotland were politically joined into Great Britain. However, the Acts of Union were predicated on a power imbalance with a marginalised Scottish representation, and thus the desire for Scottish independence persisted over the centuries.

During the 20th century, the Scottish independence movement grew bigger with the growth of the Scottish National Party (SNP). Eventually, this led the British government to hold a referendum on Scottish autonomy in 1997. The referendum saw a strong victory for greater Scottish autonomy, and granted the region its own parliament and control over fiscal matters such as healthcare and police. Nevertheless, the British government retained control over defence and foreign policy decisions.

The increased autonomy empowered the Scottish voice, and, with the victory of the SNP in the Scottish parliamentary election in 2007, paved the way for a referendum on Scottish independence in 2014. In this way, the UK government took a completely opposing approach in settling the question of independence compared to the Spanish

> For many Catalan independence activists, this symbolised the limits of what could be achieved within the existing constitutional order

government, The gamble did however pay off, as the unionist side—campaigning for Scotland to remain part of the UK—won a solid 55% victory, partly thanks to a newly awakened sense of British patriotism.

Although some argued that the failed referendum should have settled the matter, the Scottish independence movement endured and the Brexit referendum in 2016 brought a new sense of urgency to the independence movement, as Scotland voted to remain in the EU while England and Wales voted to leave. Once again, the feeling that Scotland's voice was not being heard nor listened to had returned. The political stage now seemed to be perfectly set for a new reinvigorated Scottish nationalism to take hold. However—as was the case with Catalonia—a kind of political exhaustion had begun to take a toll on the Scottish electorate. The main argument for independence—joining the EU—is also undermined by the fact that Scotland trades more with the rest of the UK than with the EU. The economic uncertainty independence would result in would be potentially devastating for the newly formed country, even if they became part of the EU (which is far from certain).

A prevalent theme within the Scottish population has been the generally strong association with the Scottish identity. Concurrently, there has also long existed a relatively strong sense of British identity among many Scots, with this dual identity at times reaching as much as 60% of the population.

Adam Wilson | Unsplash

However, support for British-Scottish identity has significantly weakened in recent years, dropping to around 25%. By comparison, in Catalonia, a significant portion of the population (around 50%) continue to maintain Spanish-Catalan dual identity. The decline in British identity is more likely a sign of dissatisfaction with the current status quo, rather than a longing for independence.

Although both movements faced political challenges and moments of opportunity, the way each government responded fundamentally shaped their trajectories.

When assessing this, one could imagine that the Scottish independence movement has gained significant ground in recent years. However, one must keep in mind that support for Scottish independence has become inextricably linked with support for the SNP. The fact that there was one single strong independence party was an advantage for the Scottish nationalists, in stark contrast to the divided and floundering Catalans. However, following two changes of leadership within the SNP, its governance has become deeply unpopular. Thus, the question put before the Scots is: do they want to either join a stagnating Europe under the guidance of an uninspiring prime minister, or stay within a stagnating UK?

Although both movements faced political challenges and moments of opportunity, the way each government responded fundamentally shaped their trajectories. In other words: the main difference is that the UK government let the Scottish independence movement hang itself, while the Spanish government bullied Catalonia into submission.

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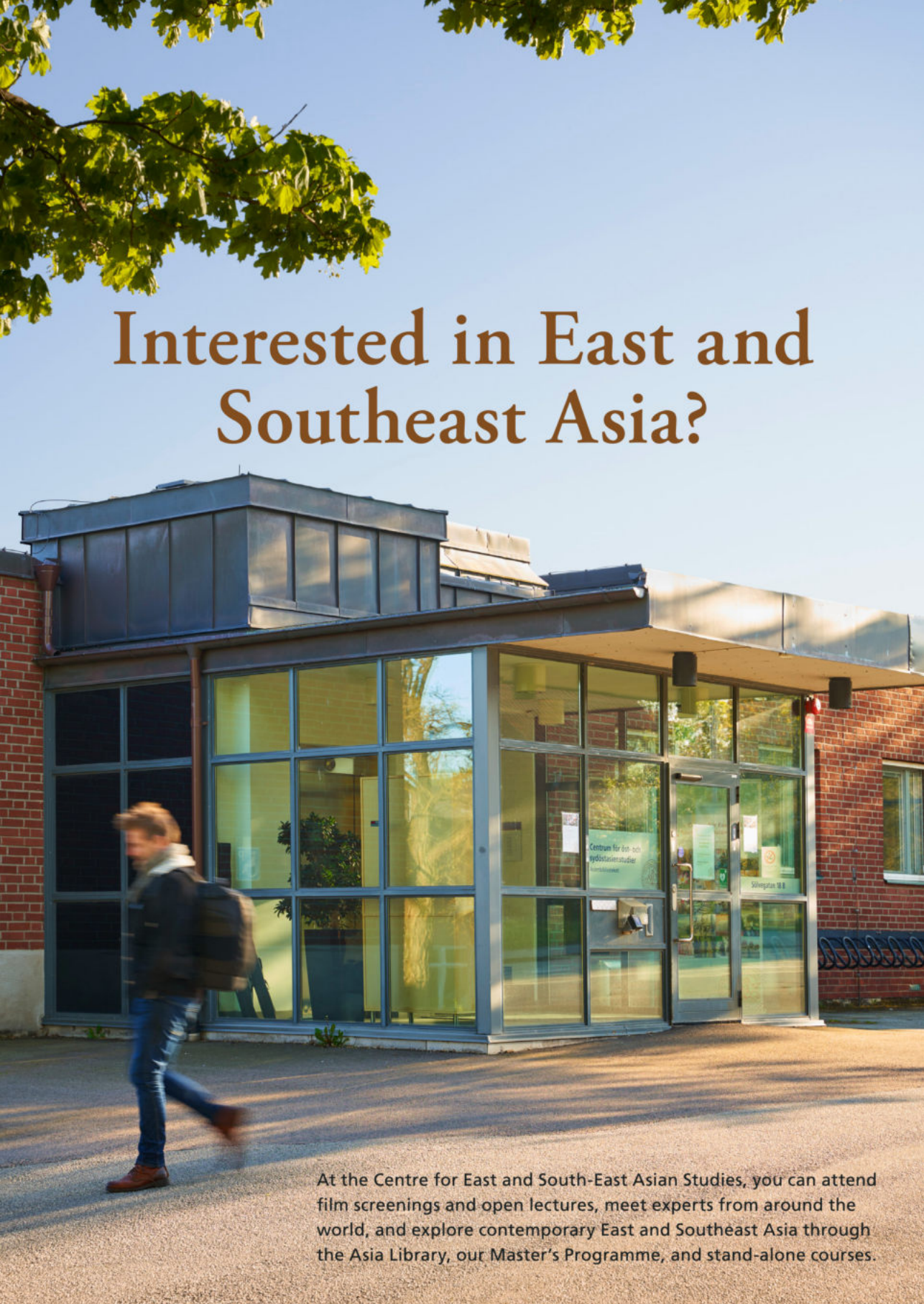

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Bloody Hands and Saffron Futures: Hindu Nationalism in the 21st century

Tara Srikkanth | Analysis

In the last days of February 2002 and for several weeks thereafter, blood stained the streets of Gujarat. As armed mobs rampaged through the Western Indian state, upwards of 2000 people were killed, more than 100 000 were internally displaced, women were subjected to unimaginable sexual violence, and homes, shops, and mosques were attacked and burned. The enactors and targets of the carnage were unmistakeable—groups of right-wing Hindus had zeroed in on the state's Muslim communities.

The violence was sparked by the eruption of a fire in a train car carrying Hindus returning from a pilgrimage to the Babri Masjid—the site of further controversy and communal division. 58 Hindus died in the fire, and despite its origins being unclear, it was soon blamed on the Muslim community.

The 2002 Gujarat riots are infamous not only for their brutality, but also for the impunity enjoyed by the culprits. Most famous among them is India's current head of state—Prime Minister Narendra Modi. Modi—who was chief minister of the state of Gujarat at the time of the riots—has long faced accusations of complicity in the outbreak of violence, although a team appointed by the Supreme Court failed to find sufficient evidence to prosecute him in 2012, a decision that was upheld ten years later.

Despite being dogged by these accusations, Modi and his Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) proceeded to to head three consecutive coalition governments, winning an outright majority in the 2019 elections. The fervour did not abate with time, either. The results of the 2024 elections were historic—Modi became the second prime minister in Indian history to win three consecutive terms after the country's first prime minister, Jawaharlal Nehru. That Modi has been able to achieve this feat, despite being followed by allegations of allowing the violence of the Gujarat riots for most of his political career, seems telling of the nature of Hindu nationalism and the state of India in the 21st century. Indeed, Hindu nationalism (a variant of which is the ethno-nationalist, far-right ideology known as 'Hindutva' meaning 'Hinduness') has thrived under the leadership of PM Modi.

Catarina Kinnvall—professor of political science and director of the Swedish South Asian Studies Network (SASNET) in Lund—credits this electoral and popular success to the BJP's ability to unify the middle class both in India and abroad, and their ability to unite their supporters against a common enemy. While there are some events—like the demolition of Babri Masjid, the Gujarat riots, or the 26/11 terrorist attacks in Mumbai—that have gained more attention and generated more animosity than others, Kinnvall says that what matters more than the event itself is the way it is spun by politicians and media.

Every time events such as these play out, Hindu nationalists seize on the opportunity to reinvent the myth of the Muslim Other.

Every time events such as these play out, Hindu nationalists seize on the opportunity to reinvent the myth of the Muslim Other. This allows for a construction of Muslims—both inside and outside India—as permanent aggressors, feeding into the narrative of victimisation that underpins Hindu nationalism. Apart from just religious division, the BJP has played on voters' economic situation to win votes. As long as there is some perceived economic benefit to voting for the BJP, convincing people to look to other parties and politicians for solutions will be a complex task.

The Hindu nationalist construction of Hindus and Muslims as eternal, irreconcilable rivals has had wider-reaching consequences than communal violence. In 2019, nationwide protests were triggered when the BJP government presented the Citizenship Amendment Bill, an amendment to the 1955 Citizenship Act. The bill fast-tracked the citizenship process for Hindus, Sikhs, Christians, Buddhists, Jains, and Parsis coming from neighbouring countries, excluding Muslim migrants from the same countries. Despite loud and widespread criticism, the bill was passed into law as the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) and took force in March 2024.

The CAA is far from the only way in which the BJP has demonstrated its slow slide toward authoritarianism—the last decade has been marked by internet shutdowns, arbitrary detentions, restrictions of academic and media freedom, and the use of spyware against Indian citizens. This gradual curtailment of civil and political rights is a cornerstone of authoritarian governance and can, increasingly, be seen in various forms all over the world.

As a tool to unite people against a common enemy, temporarily effacing differences (like caste) that otherwise would have kept them firmly apart, Islamophobia is a weapon in the arsenal of political movements in more countries than just India. The rhetoric that echoes in the streets of Delhi—of Muslims that plot to take over the country and replace other cultures with their own—can be heard in Stockholm, London, and Washington, too. This rhetoric is as effective as it is divisive and corrosive, and its effects are being reflected not just in legislation but in attitudes among everyday people, who begin to view their neighbours and former friends with suspicion and fear.

Still, not all hope is lost. While nationalist and authoritarian forces have progressed at an alarming rate in India, mirroring a development that can be seen all around the globe, there are still some forces that are resisting. According to professor Kinnvall, student movements, women's groups, civil society organisations, and academics across India and in the diaspora are putting up a fight against the narrow, homogenous India that the BJP envisions. In defiance of the saffron-tinged future that Hindu nationalists seek to build in the wreckage left by riots and demolitions, it is up to us to imagine a country that is made stronger through its diversity—one that is more beautiful for its wealth of languages, cultures and religions.

Suyash Dwivedi | Members of Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) marching with the saffron flag, 2016 | Wikimedia Commons | CC BY-SA 4.0

Tahrir Square, Cairo, Egypt | by Nomena Andrianjafy

Fifteen Years After Tahrir: Echoes of an Unfinished Revolution

Nomena Andrianjafy | Interview

On December 10, 2010, a Tunisian street vendor named Mohamed Bouazizi set himself on fire in response to the city confiscating his cart, and his death marked the beginning of the Tunisian Revolution. This unprecedented popular mobilisation quickly spread over North Africa in a phenomenon now known as the 'Arab Spring'.

On January 25, 2011, thousands of Egyptians took over Tahrir Square in Cairo, calling for the departure of Hosni Mubarak, who had been president since 1981 and had led the country with increasing brutality and human rights abuses. In Egypt, Tahrir Square became a physical symbol of the revolution, where tents were set up, food distributed, and—for the first time in many years—there was a place for political discussion.

A few weeks ago, people in Egypt celebrated the fifteenth anniversary of the revolution. For this occasion, I interviewed a friend, Marwan*, on his thoughts about Tahrir Square's legacy.

How old were you in 2011, and what do you remember from this period?

"I was seven years old when the revolution happened, so I was very young and not directly involved in the events. However, I clearly remember how life suddenly changed. Before the revolution, we used to go out often and stay outside until late at night. Once the events began, that became impossible. We stayed at home, and people in our neighbourhood organised themselves to protect our street after theft and violence spread. I remember young men gathering and using anything they could find as weapons, like bottles, wooden sticks, even kitchen knives."

At its peak, what do you think Tahrir Square symbolised to Egyptians?

"Tahrir Square, even from its name, means 'liberation'. At its peak, it symbolised resistance, dignity, and revolution. Today, when we look at it, it feels like a mix of proud memory, painful nostalgia, and unfinished emotions."

How do you think young people viewed the events of Tahrir Square at the time, compared to how they view it today?

"At the time, many young people saw it as hope and a real opportunity for change. Today, I think feelings are more complicated. It is a mix of pride, disappointment, and reflection."

Do you feel the story of what happened there is being preserved, reshaped or forgotten?

"I think there have been attempts to reshape or minimise the story. Sometimes it is described as chaos rather than a revolution. But in my opinion, it cannot be erased. Almost every Egyptian family was affected in some way—whether through loss, injury, or personal experience. Through films, songs, and memories, it is still present. We may distance ourselves from it sometimes, but we do not forget."

Do you feel your own understanding of these events has changed as you grew older? In what way?

"Yes, definitely. As a child, I did not fully understand what was happening. As I grew older, I began to see the political and social complexities behind the events, not just the emotions."

Looking back after fifteen years, what do you think was gained, even if outcomes did not match expectations?

"In my opinion, the main goals were not fully achieved. However, something important began. A new political awareness was created, especially among young people."

Do you think the spirit of 2011 is completely gone, has been transformed, or is waiting for another form?

"I do not think it is gone. I think it is quiet, maybe waiting for another form or another moment. People may step back for some time, but they do not completely forget."

Do you think people your age hesitate to talk openly about it? Why?

"Yes, I believe many people my age hesitate to talk about it openly, mostly out of fear or caution."

How have these events shaped the way young people think about politics, change, or participation in Egypt?

"At the time, the events encouraged many young people to participate politically and believe in change. Over time, that enthusiasm decreased, but the experience still shaped a generation's understanding of politics and collective action."

On February 11, 2011, when Hosni Mubarak stepped down after eighteen days of protest, Tahrir Square stood as proof that collective action could shake even the most entrenched power. The years that followed, from Mohamed Morsi's turbulent presidency to the rise of Abdel Fattah el-Sisi, left many feeling that the revolution's promises had narrowed rather than expanded.

Yet something fundamental changed.

Twenty-five years ago, much of the region seemed politically immovable, governed by leaders whose rule felt permanent. In 2011, the illusion broke. Even if outcomes did not meet expectations, a generation witnessed its own power. As Marwan suggests, the spirit of that moment is quieter now but endures in memory, awareness and the understanding that permanence is a myth.

*The name of the interviewee has been anonymised.

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Syria After Assad: Revolution, or Rebranded Repression?

Olivia Lindgren | Analysis

In December 2025, Syrians celebrated the one year anniversary of the toppling of the Assad regime. For the first time in decades, Syria stood without the iron fist rule of the Assad family. Across both the country and the diaspora, many celebrated the end of an era defined by repression, surveillance, and civil war.

Yet, while the regime's downfall is widely celebrated, the nature of the political order that replaces it remains deeply contested. The central political question is no longer whether Assad's fall was historic—it certainly was—but whether the new political order represents a genuine break with authoritarianism or merely a transformation of it.

Central to this uncertainty is the political organisation and paramilitary Islamist group Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham (HTS, or 'Organisation for the Liberation of the Levant')—the group that led the offensive culminating in Assad's removal, and which now dominates Syria's transitional government.

The origins of HTS lie in the early years of the Syrian civil war, when it operated under another name as an affiliate of al-Qaeda. At the time, the group was recognised as one of the most militarily effective jihadi groups in the fight against the Assad regime and for its commitment to a global jihadist ideology, and thus designated a terrorist organisation by the United Nations Security Council.

Over time, however, HTS underwent a series of both strategic and ideological recalibrations. In 2017, after formally breaking ties with al-Qaeda, the group merged with other factions and rebranded itself as its current form: Hay'at Tahrir al-Shams. This has by many been regarded as a 'watershed moment'—the group gradually moved away from global jihadism, and increasingly framed itself as a Syrian national actor concerned with domestic governance and stability, with the purpose of establishing Islamic rule in Syria

This transformation was not necessarily purely ideological. By distancing itself from transnational jihadism, HTS also reduced international isolation, thereby increasing the group's prospect of long-term survival.

Additionally, this created space for some pragmatic engagement with Syrian state actors. In that sense,

Oaladib | 2025 Postage 4 | Wikimedia Commons | CC BY-SA 4.0

the transformation may also have had tactical motives.

Following almost a decade of opposition against the Assad regime—ultimately resulting in the overthrow of the Assad family in late 2024—HTS's leader Ahmed al-Sharaa was announced as Syria's new president for the transitional period in January 2025. Two months later, the transitional government, headed by al-Sharaa, was formally announced by Syrian authorities. The temporary government sits on a five-year mandate, tasked with steering Syria towards national elections and a permanent constitution. However, this structure has raised concerns, as it heavily concentrates power in the executive branch—i.e. with the President. Thus, it has been argued that the arrangement risks legitimising authoritarianism under the disguise of necessity for transition. In that light, the transition may be less of a bridge to pluralism, and more of a mechanism to consolidate control.

Indications of HTS's governing style can be found in Idlib, the north-western city that HTS has ruled for several years. After eliminating rival factions, HTS consolidated control over the Idlib region, establishing the Syrian Salvation Government (SSG)—a civilian technocratic administrative body—in 2017. The SSG developed a bureaucratic structure and has been described as a tool for the HTS in its shift towards a more practical political approach. Yet, its rule was also marked by a tight constraint on civil society and political opposition. In early 2024, protests erupted against the SSG and its repressive governance, human rights violations, and economic hardship.

A kind of dual dynamic thus seems to define HTS—while the group has steered towards a more strategically adaptive approach and managed to administer territory, this was done through centralising power and suppressing opposing forces and dissent.

At the same time, the new leadership has sought to establish international recognition and legitimacy. Diplomatic engagements—including high-profile meetings in Washington and Moscow—signal an effort to reintegrate Syria into global politics. Several European states also partially eased sanctions on Syria following the establishment of the transitional government, although conditioned on the premise of inclusive governance and minority protection.

While HTS has employed official rhetoric emphasising the role of pluralism in the new Syria, pledging to respect religious and ethnic minorities, these commitments have been overshadowed by severe violence. In March and July 2025 government and affiliated forces were involved in mass killings of civilians from minority groups. In March 2025, forces swept through Alawite-majority areas of Tartous, Latakia, and Hama, killing at least 1400 people and leaving mass graves and burned homes behind. In July, violence spread to the Druze-majority Sweida governorate, where around 1000 people were killed, including at least 539 civilians, according to Human Rights Watch and UN experts. Regime forces have also attacked Rojava, the self-governed Kurdish region in north-east Syria, and taken over large portions of its territory as of January 2026.

Such events expose a central dilemma now facing the international community. While the fall of the Assad regime was widely welcomed, supporting Syria's political transition risks conferring legitimacy to a leadership whose historical and contemporary conduct raises profound concerns, while quietly legitimising its actions.

Ultimately, Syria's political trajectory will depend not only on HTS's intentions and capacity to govern, but also on pressure from rival domestic actors and international actors' approaches towards Syria and its new government. The fact that HTS has survived for over a decade, however, does reflect an endurance and capacity to reinvent itself in response to shifting realities. Whether these traits will translate into an accountable government and pragmatic state-building, or merely underpin a new form of authoritarian rule, remains the defining question of Syria's new era.

The question is no longer whether Assad's fall was historic but whether the new order is a genuine break with authoritarianism or merely a transformation of it

My Damascus Gallery: Stillness and Change

Santeri Rönty | Reportage

Those who know me know that I like to spend plenty of time travelling. Unsurprisingly enough, in June 2025, I flew from Cairo to Beirut, then crossed the land border into Syria. I had been dreaming of Damascus for years, and now all of it had become possible.

After the fall of Bashar al-Assad's Ba'athist regime, Syria had become accessible to the outside world overnight. There I was: standing in front of one of the gates of the Old City of Damascus, Bab Sharqi.

What follows is an exhibit of my film photos from Damascus, all shot with my trusted Canon AE-1, with which I used my all-time favourite film Ektar 100.

by Santeri Rönty

(I.) Café in Khan As'ad Pasha, the largest 'khan' (or caravanserai) in Damascus, built in the mid-18th century.

(II.) The Umayyad Mosque is indisputably the most known sight in all of Damascus. Built in the beginning of the 8th century, the Umayyad Mosque is one of the oldest and largest mosques in the world. Its large courtyard and unique mosaics make it one of the most beautiful landmarks I have ever visited.

(III.) 'Souq al-Hamidiyyah' is the central market, or 'souq', in the old city. There is no better place in all of Damascus to do your shopping: by the end of my time in Syria, my backpack was filled with spices, soap, and perfumes from the souq. The holes in the metal roof of the souq? Said to be the result of French air raids on the city during the Great Syrian Revolt of 1925.

(IV. and V.) Some of the traditional Damascene courtyards have been made into cafés. This was one of them. Above the mirror, the Syrian coat of arms that was used during the first six months of the new regime.

by Santeri Rönty

On my last day in Damascus, 13 June 2025, I woke up to news about an Israeli attack on Iran. I had gotten up early to find public transport back to Lebanon to spend a few days in Beirut before my flight back to Cairo. You may recall videos from Beirut circulating on social media depicting a number of missiles in the night sky around this time. I was in Beirut then, watching the very same missiles in the sky from my hostel's rooftop in the northern parts of the city. Around a week after I had left Syria, Islamist militants targeted the Mar Elias Church in Damascus, killing 30 people. I was staying at a hotel right next to that church. Though Syria has witnessed improved relative stability since the regime change, these kinds of events just go to show that the situation can deteriorate quickly.

In the end, my time in Damascus was definitely memorable. I ate some of the best food I had ever had, spent time with locals, bought some of the most beautiful souvenirs, and sat at numerous gorgeous cafés. All I regret is not being able to stay longer and not having the opportunity to see more of the country: Aleppo, Latakia, Palmyra, and many others are definitely on my list. The Syria that I saw was the Syria that I hope the world will now get to see.

(VI.) Metalware for sale in Souq al-Hamidiyyah

(VII.) One of the less crowded alleys in the souq

(VIII.) Streets of Damascus

(IX.) Spice store in the souq

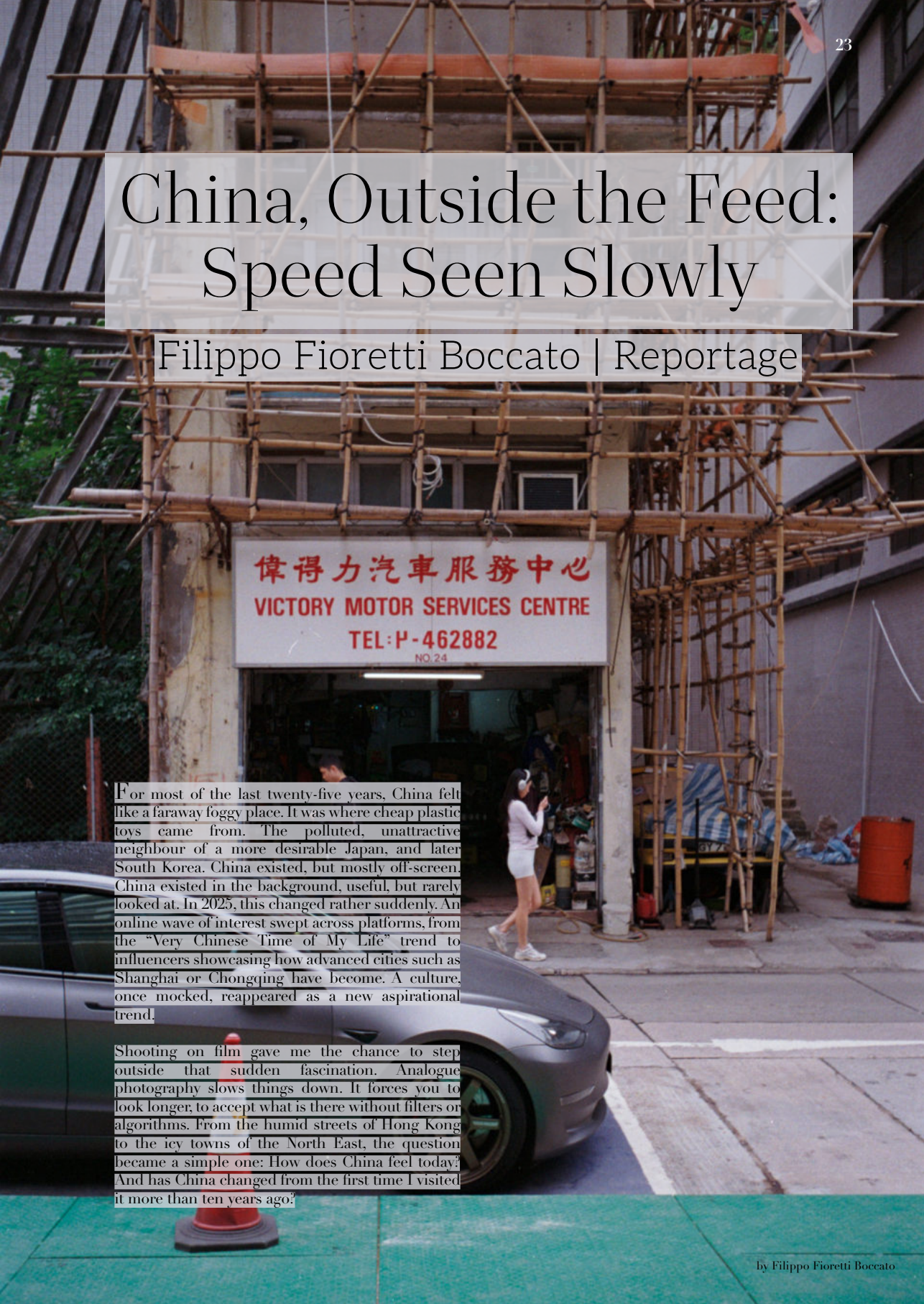
by Santeri Rönty

(X.) The new flag of Syria attached to 'Bab Sharqi', one of the seven main gates in the Old City of Damascus.

by Santeri Rönty

China, Outside the Feed: Speed Seen Slowly

Filippo Fioretti Boccato | Reportage



For most of the last twenty-five years, China felt like a faraway foggy place. It was where cheap plastic toys came from. The polluted, unattractive neighbour of a more desirable Japan, and later South Korea. China existed, but mostly off-screen. China existed in the background, useful, but rarely looked at. In 2025, this changed rather suddenly. An online wave of interest swept across platforms, from the "Very Chinese Time of My Life" trend to influencers showcasing how advanced cities such as Shanghai or Chongqing have become. A culture, once mocked, reappeared as a new aspirational trend.

Shooting on film gave me the chance to step outside that sudden fascination. Analogue photography slows things down. It forces you to look longer, to accept what is there without filters or algorithms. From the humid streets of Hong Kong to the icy towns of the North East, the question became a simple one: How does China feel today? And has China changed from the first time I visited it more than ten years ago?

by Filippo Fioretti Boccato

Hong Kong is where the clock seems to have stalled. The city still feels very early 2000s. Bilingual signs everywhere. Roads packed with Western and Japanese cars. Bamboo scaffolding, for now, still holding up the skyline. Cash still changing hands without friction. Hong Kong feels like a humid, hyper-dense European city dropped into southern China. Efficient, familiar, and oddly frozen.

The contrast arrives quickly. From Kat O, a small Hakka island, the outskirts of Shenzhen rise abruptly behind wooden boats and low houses. One Country, Two Systems still means a physical interruption: a border, a stamp, a pause. Then everything accelerates. A silent 300 km/h train later, I am in Changsha, capital of Hunan.

This is where the last 25 years become impossible to ignore. China is now effectively cashless. Smartphones are no longer accessories but infrastructure. Being offline is not a choice so much as an inconvenience. And yet, continuity is everywhere. Parks are still filled with dancing crowds, retirees moving in loose synchrony, groups forming and dissolving as they always have. What has changed is mediation. Where routines were once led by instructors with portable speakers, Chinese social media platforms now set the choreography, supply the soundtrack, gather the audience, and turn these everyday performances into something shared far beyond the park gates.

by Filippo Fioretti Boccato

Just outside Changsha is Shaoshan. Mao Zedong's birthplace. People arrive from across the country. His favourite cigarettes are placed beside his statue. Flowers are arranged carefully. Mao is still here, not as nostalgia, but as almost a stable reference point in a society moving fast.

by Filippo Fioreti Boccato

Further north, Beijing feels controlled and stately. The capital has a stern calm. Tian'anmen Square now requires a booking. So do most major sites. Unlike Shanghai or Shenzhen, Beijing has stayed low. No skyscrapers loom over the Forbidden City or the hutongs. Life stays close to the ground. Siheyuan courtyards now have air conditioners, alleyways hum with electric bikes, and old Beijingers still sit outside playing mahjong when the autumn sun is kind.

by Filippo Fioretti Boccato

From the old Beijing Railway Station, restored to its 1950s look, green slow trains head north. China has built tens of thousands of kilometres of fast and convenient high-speed rail, but I take the slow and squeaking Friendship Train instead. It moves at a different pace. It leads to Dandong, on the border with North Korea. On the riverfront, a woman rents Korean dresses to tourists posing with Sinuiju behind them. Even the edge of the map has become a destination.

by Filippo Fioretti Boccato

In Shenyang, Mao appears again, this time towering over a central square. Around him: Luckin Coffee, WeChat-unlocked bikes, endless rows of Chinese-made EVs. In the Shenyang Forbidden City, posing for photos feels mandatory. Historical costumes, playful exaggeration, influencer logic applied to imperial space.

Even in places I expected to feel left behind, the future is already under construction. In a historic village in Shanxi, workers warn me about freshly laid pavement. They are restoring the entire area. When I tell them I came to see the locations where films by Jia Zhangke were shot, they laugh. I arrived just in time, they say. Soon, everything will look new again. When I ask for a photograph, they gladly pose, smiling with pride at their role in the steady march of progress.

Over the past 25 years, China has changed in ways that go beyond infrastructure and wealth. Time itself feels compressed. Photographs taken in 2015 already sound like echoes of a transition now largely complete, a moment I am glad I did not miss.

p.23:
Leica M3/Summarom 3.5/35/Fujicolor400 - Hong Kong - Sid Ying Pun
p.24:
Leica M3/Summarom 3.5/35/Fujicolor400 - Hong Kong/Sheung Wan
Leica M3/Summicron 2/50/KodakPorta400 - Kat O Island, Hong Kong
p.25:
Leica M3/Summicron 2/50/OrwoWolfenNC400 - Changsha and Shaoshan (Hunan Province)
p.26:
Leica M3/Summicron 2/50/IlfordDelta400 - Beijing
Leica M3/Voigtlander 1.2/40 /GinestaII400 - Dandong (Liaoning Province)
p.27:
Leica M3/Voigtlander 1.2/40/KodakT400TX - Shenyang (Liaoning Province)
p.28
Leica M3/Voigtlander 1.2/40/KodakT400TX - Xiaoyi Village (Shanxi Province)

by Filippo Fioretti Boccato

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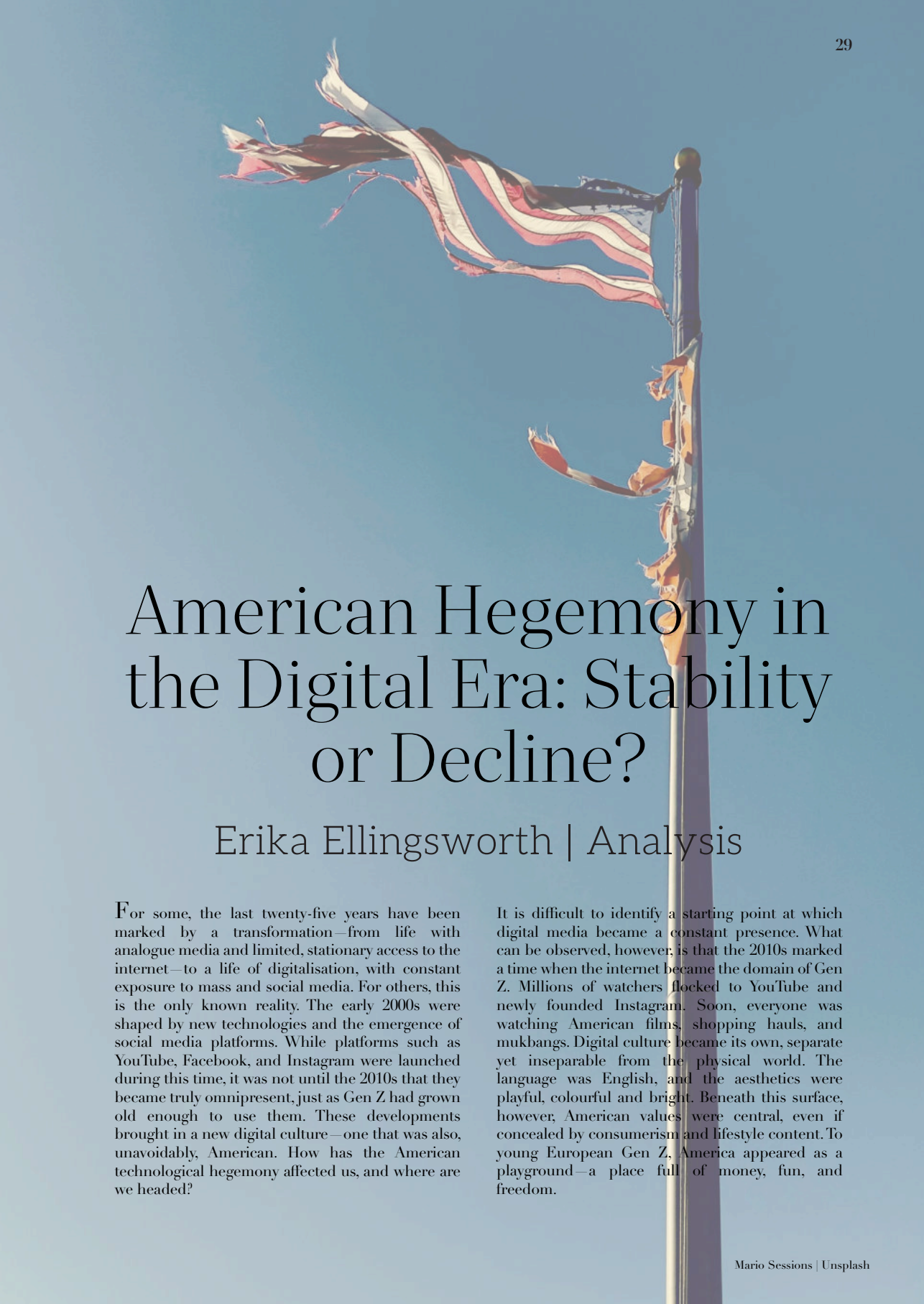

American Hegemony in the Digital Era: Stability or Decline?

Erika Ellingsworth | Analysis

For some, the last twenty-five years have been marked by a transformation—from life with analogue media and limited, stationary access to the internet—to a life of digitalisation, with constant exposure to mass and social media. For others, this is the only known reality. The early 2000s were shaped by new technologies and the emergence of social media platforms. While platforms such as YouTube, Facebook, and Instagram were launched during this time, it was not until the 2010s that they became truly omnipresent, just as Gen Z had grown old enough to use them. These developments brought in a new digital culture—one that was also, unavoidably, American. How has the American technological hegemony affected us, and where are we headed?

It is difficult to identify a starting point at which digital media became a constant presence. What can be observed, however, is that the 2010s marked a time when the internet became the domain of Gen Z. Millions of watchers flocked to YouTube and newly founded Instagram. Soon, everyone was watching American films, shopping hauls, and mukbangs. Digital culture became its own, separate yet inseparable from the physical world. The language was English, and the aesthetics were playful, colourful and bright. Beneath this surface, however, American values were central, even if concealed by consumerism and lifestyle content. To young European Gen Z, America appeared as a playground—a place full of money, fun, and freedom.

Mario Sessions | Unsplash

Digital culture became its own, separate yet inseparable from the physical world

Digital culture has never been separable from American culture, as leading technological companies have mainly been American. From 2005 to 2012, media platforms like Facebook and YouTube exploded on the internet, and the American economy allowed for largely unrestricted growth in Silicon Valley. America—which already held hegemonic power over the Western world—was further established as a global epicentre. In turn, European youth grew up exposed to an oversaturated digital culture in which life on the other side of the Atlantic was instantly idealised. American ideals were transferred onto trends and movements worldwide. If any generation was raised under American hegemony, it was Gen Z, and they continue to carry it with them.

Just as difficult as it is to determine the beginning of American influence over European Gen Z, it is equally difficult to identify what many view as the beginning of the end. At some stage, Europeans—much like a nation colonised by a sovereign power—began to criticise the culture they had been living under. A growing consensus emerged: not only was American politics increasingly questioned, but American stereotypes of loudness, ignorance, and disrespect also gained traction.

While being far from over, American cultural power became, if not compromised, criticised. Not long after, American politics seemed to escalate drastically, from the 2024 election of Donald Trump to a slew of extreme events. In 2025, Venezuelan drug boats were bombed by the U.S. government, a development which ultimately ended with the capture of Maduro in January 2026. The Epstein files were intermittently released and censored, seemingly with no noteworthy consequences to the president. Perhaps most egregiously for the Nordic population, Trump threatened to bring Greenland under U.S. control in early 2026. The ways in which American power was suddenly brought closer to Europe than previously imagined led to a new, uneasy consensus: America is both an impending threat and an essence to the digital and cultural existence.

Today, European Gen Z faces a dilemma. Ever fascinated by America and raised by its pervasive cultural power, they watch. They watch as the U.S.—the country they grew up to idealise—appears to rapidly dismantle its democratic foundations, while increasingly threatening the world around it. They speak with American accents they picked up from watching American YouTube on American iPads, picking apart everything that seems to be going wrong with that distant, elusive place. One must wonder whether this moment represents a true turning point for American hegemony, or if its sheer power will leave us all helpless. Helpless, not only in the face of military or political aggression, but also under the dominance of American culture, which—with the risk of sounding nationalistic—continuously makes Europe turn toward the other side of the Atlantic rather than on our own continent, or, dare we ever imagine it, the east.

This is certainly a pessimistic view, one that imagines Europeans as colonised by a great distant power, unable to free themselves from something as vague yet potent as culture. America has shaped the Western world long before the internet, but digital media has widened and saturated its reach. If anything, the compounding of American digital culture has granted American hegemony a new form of influence: the power of being perceived as natural. American culture was long—as if by coincidence, rather than design—disguised as digitalisation itself. Now, as the United States shows signs of political and, consequently, cultural decay, that influence becomes visible.

They speak with American accents they picked up from watching American Youtube on American iPads, picking apart everything that seems to be going wrong with that distant, elusive place

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From the Servers to the Press: a multi-platform collaboration

The Perspective Magazine is proud to showcase three recent pieces from The Perspective Webzine, the online publishing outlet of the UPF magazine.

For this issue, we have selected articles that closely reflect the overarching theme of our publication, 'After the End of History: Rupture, Resistance, Reinvention'. Each of these pieces engage, in its own way, with the unexpected turns of the past 25 years—from the promises of a stable post-Cold War order to the disruptive force of digital technologies and new forms of political anxiety. Together, they offer timely reflections on literature, technology and contemporary politics that sit naturally within this edition's broader exploration of international affairs, international relations, polity and policy.

Republishing these works in print is more than an editorial choice. It is also an opportunity to give tangible form to writing that usually lives exclusively online, allowing it to reach readers in a different format and context. At the same time, this collaboration stands as a visible sign of the ever-present connection between the different branches of The Perspective Media, reinforcing our shared commitment to open debate and cross-platform dialogue.

Lessons in Literature: What Sci-Fi Can Enlighten about Current Affairs

Carmen Elizabeth Kardan Calvo | Opinion | Webzine

In a world of technological overreach and political institutional decay, we can observe that for decades, science fiction has mapped out how society can prosper, but also deteriorate. Sci-fi authors seemingly predicted AI, smartphones, synthetic meat, space rockets and atomic bombs. It explored different dimensions of society, power and technology through philosophy and fiction, and in doing so, it has potentially provided us with lessons on how to manage our dystopian realities.

We are progressively facing phenomena that just a decade ago could only be encountered on a page, so might the answers to our questions on how to deal with contemporary political challenges also be found on a page?

Now, more than ever, I find myself increasingly drawing parallels between my favourite books and current affairs. The announcement of the 'Dune: Part Three' movie coming out in December 2026 has left many fans, including myself, excited, and has prompted me to engage in yet another re-read of the original hexalogy by Frank Herbert.

10,000 years before Paul Atreides' adventures on Arrakis, there was a brutal galaxy-wide war where humans fought to overthrow sentient machines. Humans succeeded and established the commandment that 'thou shalt not make a machine in the likeness of a human mind'. This is an obvious allusion to AI and provides an ominous imaginary outcome of AI, which is increasingly topical as anxieties surrounding artificial intelligence rise.

In '2001: A Space Odyssey' by Arthur C. Clarke, 'Hal 9000' is an intelligent spaceship computer that malfunctions due to a psychotic break, killing most of the crew on the spaceship. Hal is a warning, showing us that technology is not infallible and that technology is never really neutral. A lesson that we can take from this is that AI can go wrong, and the consequences can be catastrophic to say the least.

There are examples in reality that are, thankfully, less theatrical, such as an Air Canada chatbot giving a traveller wrong advice, resulting in the airline having to pay for the damages, and AI advising small businesses to break the law. Additionally, the 'Dead Internet Theory' posits that eventually all internet content will be generated by bots and AI rather than real humans, creating a synthetic, dead space, to control algorithms and influence consumers. So if the data being generated is flawed, then what we learn from the internet is, by association, flawed.

Though there is a European legal framework regarding AI, the EU has a desire to develop a strategy to safely integrate AI into various sectors. However, there is a clear lesson, not just in fiction but also emerging in reality, that when things go wrong with AI, it can be unpleasant. Perhaps we

Christopher Kuzman | Unsplash

should take a page out of Herbert and Clarke's books and use fiction as a warning. Maybe we should avoid using AI for high-level executive functions, such as AI government ministers (yes, I am looking at you Albania). Because when AI gets it wrong again, and it will, it goes beyond asking whether it will be held accountable, but whether it can be held accountable.

Another interesting technological topic that science fiction often tends to present is the misuse of technology. Through censorship and propaganda, we can lose our grip on the 'truth', calling into question the media we consume. In a world of algorithms and targeted ads, we should challenge the powers behind who control what we consume, and their agendas. This idea is presented by George Orwell in '1984', who also presents the issues of a surveillance state, as well as by Ray Bradbury in 'Fahrenheit 451'.

The lessons sci-fi books can provide us are, however, by no means limited to technology. 'Dune' also warns against trusting charismatic leaders and criticises strongman politics and populist myths, as they can centralise power and erode institutions, leading to social and political instability. The literature calls on you to criticise alleged 'saviours' or 'chosen ones' due to the events that unfold in the books (no spoilers).

If the lessons so far seem obvious to you, that is because sci-fi has a deep, reflective relationship with history. 'Fahrenheit 451', though futuristic, reflects the themes of the era in which it was written, being inspired by the book burnings in Nazi Germany. Octavia Butler's novels frequently explore the themes of power and the traumatic history of black Americans through her sci-fi books, using these themes as a basis for speculative fiction. 'Foundation' by Isaac Asimov explicitly draws on the fall of the Roman Empire to explore cycles of imperial collapse and return in civilisation.

Though this is by no means a comprehensive list of what sci-fi can enlighten us about in the current world, these are examples of how literature turns abstract political and technological phenomena into an interesting anecdote, preserving historical memory and echoing past failures and sentiments. This can train us to recognise patterns of power and their consequences in our daily lives.

The famous quote by philosopher George Santayana goes, "[t]hose who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it". If we want to learn from history, then perhaps we could also learn through fiction.

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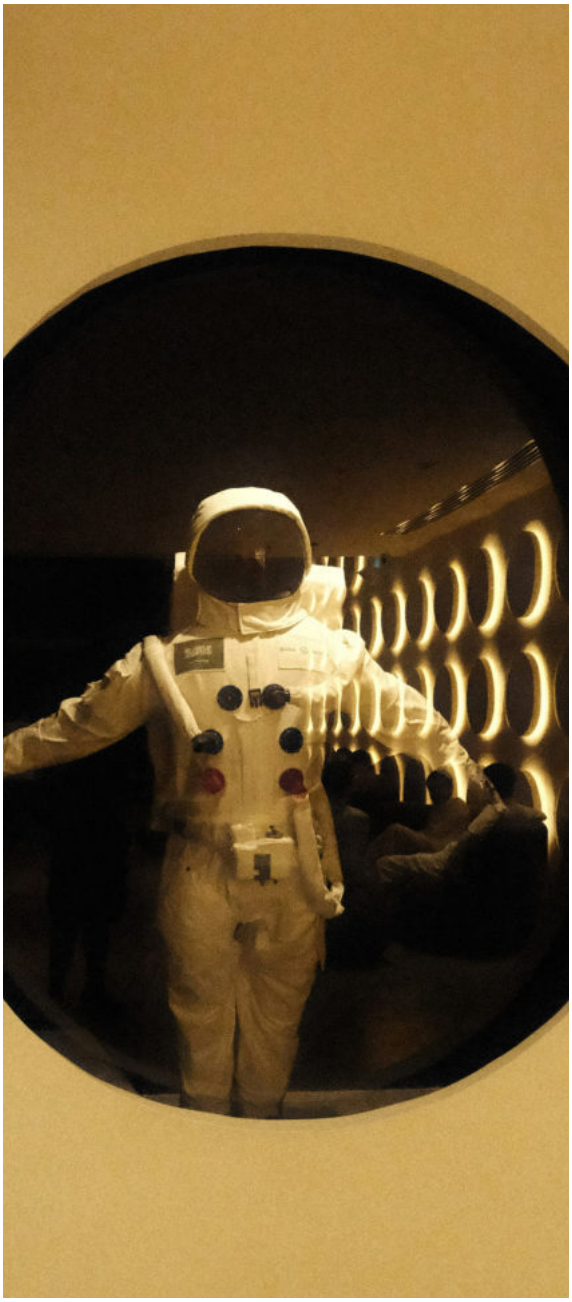

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Finnish Government | Prime Minister of Sweden Ulf Kristersson in Helsinki 28.10.2022 | Flickr (via Wikimedia Commons) | CC BY 2.0

Threatened by Code? AI's Impact on Democracy

Ella Målberg | Opinion | Webzine

The world is increasingly digitalised. With a growing trend of democratic backsliding, we ought to be vigilant about how the digital world plays a role in the wider unfolding of our democratic societies. The arguably most tumultuous development in tech right now is generative AI, such as 'ChatGPT', which is able to produce new content, whether text, photos or videos, thanks to algorithms trained on pre-existing data. In a survey conducted last year, 25% of the Swedish population reported having used generative AI in the past three months, with youth aged 16-24 averaging over 50%.

The fact that the AI models are trained on past data is an incredibly important factor to keep in mind. This factor means that AI models risk reproducing social biases in the content that they put out. For example, asking AI to generate a speech from a CEO resulted in the speaker being male 100% of the time, and white 90% of the time. And while OpenAI has put guardrails in place to hinder ChatGPT from using slurs, AI models have been shown to be covertly racist, discriminating against users who use African American Vernacular English. If AI assumes the world looks like what our biases show it, could that not spill over into other responses it creates?

So, how do these social biases play a role in our democracy? In an interview, the Swedish Prime Minister Ulf Kristersson told 'Dagens Industri' that

he and his colleagues regularly use AI, such as ChatGPT, in their work to get second opinions. This shows one avenue through which we permit generative AI to influence politics, through potentially skewed responses to prompts. Meanwhile, a proponent of the PM's use of AI argues that he never said that he shares any sensitive information, and that it is surely better to investigate how AI can help in his work, rather than being too scared to try.

Taken one step further, Albania has appointed an AI-generated minister named 'Diella' to its government. While the government claims the bot will have a positive effect, aimed at combating corruption and pushing for transparency, criticisms and concerns have been raised over its trustworthiness and accountability.

While 'Diella' is not aimed to make decisions of her own, countless micro-decisions about which aspects of issues to prioritise and what to leave out will be left in her hands to inform the government, which may shape or constrain the human judgements that follow her operations. Another issue with using AI in government is the handling of sensitive government data, raising significant cybersecurity concerns.

But what of the general public? One way in which you may be affected is through prompting AI to give you information about an upcoming election and it generating a hallucinatory response, thereby spreading misinformation to you. Even if you would rather Google and find your own sources, the first thing we now see after Googling something is an AI-generated response. It is becoming increasingly impossible to escape the comfort of AI and the simplicity of trusting it—despite knowing that it may misinform.

It is becoming increasingly impossible to escape the comfort of AI and the simplicity of trusting it—despite knowing that it may misinform

AI models risk reproducing social biases in the content that they put out.

Another way we may be affected by generative AI is through social media. There have been cases worldwide in which deepfakes of prominent political figures have sparked social media controversies. In Turkey, the consequences of such controversies became evident as a candidate had to resign from the presidential election in 2023 as a result of explicit deepfakes being spread online.

Lastly, the usage of deepfakes was exemplified in the New York mayoral campaigns, where candidate Andrew Cuomo briefly had an AI-generated campaign ad posted on his X-account before taking it down. The video depicted different criminals showing their support for the opposition candidate Zohran Mamdani, and it was criticised for perpetuating racist stereotypes. And, while being quite obviously AI-generated to the trained eye, it raises questions of how candidates may come to use AI to try to sway public opinion, especially as AI-generated videos continue to grow harder to distinguish from real-life recordings.

Whether you are for or against generative AI, you cannot doubt the fact that it is becoming increasingly integrated into our lives and that it becomes all the more difficult to decipher what is real from AI as the technology advances. What is important for all of us to bear in mind is that this is the reality that we live in. We cannot blindly trust all videos, audio or text that we see online. We have to be more critical than ever before. While discussions of how to implement policies to best extract the benefits while avoiding the worst harms of AI are being had, we need to be attentive to how AI works. How we use it, and how our elected officials use it, has an impact on our democracies, and it is up to us to shape the type of society we want to live in.

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Updates on Our New "Big Brother"Era

Sofia Mina Pessina | Opinion | Webzine

All across social media platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube, cries of protest are echoing against what many are calling the 'Chat Control' laws. This dystopian project, critics claim, was pushed by the EU to scrutinise every picture, message and opinion we share with our peers online.
However, putting aside the flood of sensationalised headlines condemning an alleged violation of fundamental rights, important questions remain: How much of it is true? What are the 'EU Chat Control' laws about? What is actually happening?
'EU Chat Control' is the affectionate nickname that has been given to the Child Sexual Abuse Regulation (CSAR) proposed in 2022 by Ylva Johansson, the European Commissioner for Home Affairs. Its purpose is to combat online pedocriminality by implementing a series of measures, including those specific 'EU Chat Control' laws. By scanning and detecting pedophilic material, the EU hopes to fight the online exploitation of children more effectively.

After years of stalemate, technical amendments, and political brinkmanship, the Council of the European Union reached a common position in November 2025. For the first time since 2022, member states aligned sufficiently to move the Child Sexual Abuse Regulation forward into trilogue negotiations with the European Parliament.
The Council text scaled back the idea of blanket detection orders to instead lean more heavily on risk assessments, mitigation obligations, and extend the current voluntary detection regime beyond its original expiry date. In other words: the dystopian scenario of every European citizen's messages being automatically screened before delivery has, for now, been tempered. Yet the regulation is nowhere near harmless; companies may still be subjected to detection requirements under specific conditions. Meaning that there is still a risk of putting down the foundations for a permanent surveillance infrastructure.

Experts in the field of cybersecurity warn that client-side scanning introduces significant security challenges by expanding the attack surface to user devices, making them vulnerable to hacking, manipulation, or exploitation by malicious actors. Ensuring proper controls to prevent misuse or circumvention is notoriously difficult, raising risks of unauthorized surveillance and system compromise. Meanwhile, the well-documented limitations of AI detection systems raise the likelihood of false positives, endangering innocent individuals and fuelling a surveillance machinery that does little to address the real roots of the problem.

This is where there is more complexity added to the matter. No serious critic denies the urgency of combating online child sexual abuse. The scale of the crime is devastating, and victims deserve protection, justice, and the removal of their images from endless circulation. The actual discussion is if we are using the right tools. UNICEF itself has stressed that the real challenge is "not the absence of legislation but its enforcement, monitoring and coordination". Education of minors, parents, and

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communities; investment in trained investigators; international cooperation; prevention and rehabilitation programmes—these are less sensational than surveillance technology, yet arguably more effective.

Discussions around exemptions have resurfaced as well during negotiations. Certain categories of privileged communication—journalists, lawyers, and other protected professions—are widely understood to require additional safeguards under European law. Yet the optics remain uncomfortable. If a system is truly water-tight, safe from leaks or abuse, why must some communications be shielded from it? The tension exposes a deeper problem: trust in institutions is fragile, and surveillance measures, once introduced, rarely remain confined to their original scope.

As of February 2026, the CSAR has not been adopted. The file is now in trilogue—the closed-door phase where the Council, Parliament, and Commission attempt to reconcile their respective texts. Amendments can still reshape the proposal significantly. Provisions once removed could reappear in altered form; safeguards may be strengthened or diluted. The outcome is not predetermined.

What is clear, however, is that this regulation has already set a precedent in one respect: it has forced Europe to confront the limits of digital privacy in the name of protection. If adopted in an expansive form, it will lay the groundwork for future legislation that could be equally, if not more, invasive. If significantly narrowed, it may reaffirm strong encryption standards but leave policymakers under pressure to propose alternative solutions. Either path will shape the trajectory of European digital governance for years to come.

This may sound fatalistic, but there is still a silver lining. It takes just one click to stay informed and make a difference within the democratic institutions of the EU. From the comfort of our homes, we can follow parliamentary debates, read draft amendments, and contact our representatives. As EU citizens, we have the right—and the responsibility—to scrutinise legislation that affects the very architecture of our private lives.

The question has never been whether child sexual abuse should be fought. It must be. The question is how we do so without quietly constructing the very 'Big Brother' infrastructure we claim to fear. The choice, ultimately, remains ours.

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European Commission/Jennifer Jacquemart | European Union, 2026 | Ylva Johansson, European Commissioner for Home Affairs, receives Ashton Kutcher, co-founder of Thorn | Wikimedia Commons | CC BY 4.0

First Quarter, Rising Heat: Climate Governance in the 21st Century

Milla Kotani | Analysis

At the beginning of the 21st century, President George W. Bush withdrew the United States from the Kyoto Protocol, the first legally binding international treaty aimed at reducing greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions, before it even entered into force. The US administration justified its decision by arguing that Kyoto imposed disproportionate obligations on industrialised nations while exempting major emerging economies. This early retreat from multilateral climate governance set the tone for the first quarter marked by political resistance, weak accountability mechanisms, and contested international cooperation in addressing the climate crisis. Twenty-five years later, the climate emergency has been globally recognised and has reshaped international diplomacy, yet profound implementation and accountability gaps persist, perpetuating to burden the most environmentally vulnerable nations.

In 2005, the Kyoto Protocol entered into force as the first legally binding treaty addressing global warming as a monitored obligation for developed countries to reduce their GHG emissions by an average 5% below 1990 levels. However, developing countries—including major carbon emitters such as China and India—weren't compelled, and the later withdrawal by the United States, severely affected the treaty's effectiveness. By 2012, global GHG emissions had increased by 44% compared to 1997 levels, largely driven by rising emissions in developing countries.

Although it didn't create the desired impact on reducing greenhouse gas emissions, the Kyoto protocol was a landmark for tackling climate issues in an international consensual agreement. In 2009, at the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change in Copenhagen (UNFCCC COP15), Denmark raised severe concerns about the capacity of multilateralism and consensus to deliver in front of global challenges such as the climate crisis. During the conference, the Green Climate Fund was mentioned (and later formally established) as a financial mechanism of the Convention to support projects in developing countries related to climate change mitigation, adaptation, and technology development, as the most affected countries by climate change consequences have contributed the least to global GHG emissions.

At the 2015 Paris Agreement, adopted at UNFCCC COP21, ongoing international negotiations culminated in the first universal legally binding global climate deal aimed at limiting the increase in temperatures ideally under 1.5 degrees Celsius. The agreement also addressed the need for adaptation to climate change by providing financial and other forms of support for developing countries. Furthermore, it reaffirmed the principle of Common but Differentiated Responsibilities and Respective Capacities (CBDR-RC), acknowledging the historical responsibility of Global North countries for the majority of past emissions. While all countries share an obligation to address climate change, the agreement recognised that UNFCCC Parties have differing duties and responsibilities in addressing its negative impacts.

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However, in 2017—six months after the Paris Agreement entered into force—US President Donald Trump announced his intent to withdraw the United States from the Paris Agreement, damaging once again the progress of an international climate treaty to reduce GHG emissions and raising further concerns about the effectiveness of international multilateralism.

Although climate diplomacy has intensified in response to the growing impacts of climate change with the European Parliament recognizing a global climate emergency and promoting the European Climate Law to reach climate neutrality by 2050 in the European Union—the world's historically largest GHG emitters have continued to fall short on aligning their domestic policies with climate change adaptation and mitigation measures. This disconnection thus jeopardises the effectiveness of climate negotiations, as other countries may hesitate to comply if the biggest polluters are not making comparable contributions.

From 2021 to 2024, under President Joe Biden, the United States rejoined the Paris Agreement, and committed to the goal of pursuing climate neutrality in upcoming negotiations. However, when Donald Trump returned to presidency in 2025, the US once again withdrew from its multilateral agreements on climate change, and the country's GHG emissions increased by 2.4%.

Recognising the disproportionate impact of climate change on populations and communities in the Global South—who have contributed the least to the climate crisis and have limited resources to cope with its consequences— the UNFCCC COP27 in

Climate diplomacy has intensified in response to the growing impacts of climate change with the European Parliament recognizing a global climate emergency

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2022 saw nations agree to establish the Loss and Damage Fund, a financial assistance mechanism to address and compensate the impacts incurred due to climate change, coordinated by The World Bank from voluntary contributions from developed countries. Yet, by UNFCCC COP30 in 2025, the details of the Fund's operation and efficiency and accountability through the voluntary nature of the climate finance mechanisms remained unsettled.

While significant work remains regarding the approach for the increasing climate change consequences, 2025 saw important developments in international law. The International Court of Justice (ICJ) and the Inter-American Human Rights Court (IACtHR) issued Advisory Opinions regarding the climate emergency and the States' legal obligations to prevent irreversible harm to the environment, and recognised the right to a healthy environment as a jus cogens norm—therefore, non-negotiable under international law. The ICJ also ruled that countries are legally obliged to protect and prevent harm to the environment, as well as take action to reduce GHG emissions, thus making it clear that a country's failure to act and protect the environment constitutes a breach of international law.

The first quarter of the 21st century showed that climate action has been advancing in international diplomacy. Yet, stronger measures and mechanisms for accountability and effectiveness are still needed to tackle the increasing climate change consequences. For the next quarter of the century, it is essential that countries take responsibility for their historical role in the climate crisis and follow through on their commitments to achieve climate neutrality.

A New Dawn for Industrial Policy: The Market as a Global Battleground

Sabina Rameke | Feature

The Neoliberal view of economics, particularly en vogue in the late 20th century, holds that the market is the best mechanism for resource allocation we have. The market is efficient in that good ideas generally succeed and bad ideas generally fail. Attempts by the state to direct the market create distortions and economic inefficiencies. Intervention is interference.

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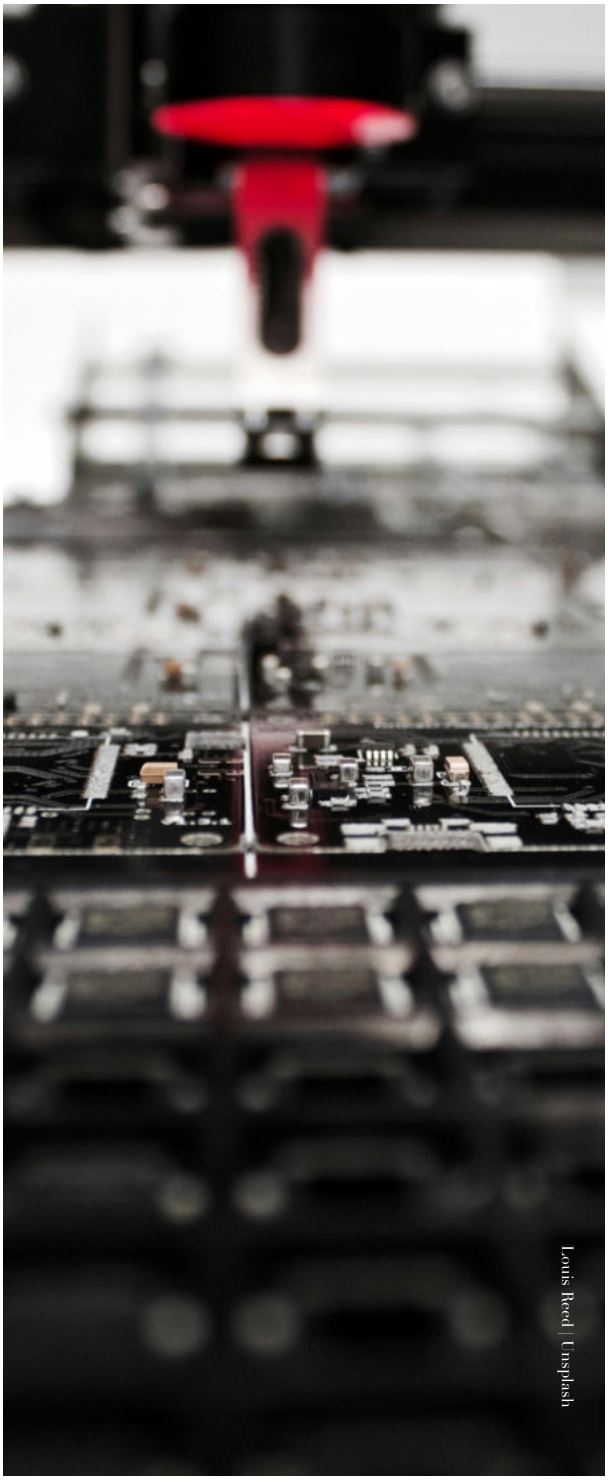
This idea appears to have lost its shine in the minds of policymakers worldwide, not least in the European Union. Geoeconomics, the use of economic policies in pursuit of geopolitical interests, is on the rise: government interventions in the economy have increased dramatically since 2019. These interventions are targeted and strategic; it's a departure from an era when innovation of any kind was seen as vital to the realisation of a so-called knowledge economy. The 2000s and 2010s churned out a host of mobile apps that changed the way we communicate and revolutionised gig work. Cities around the world tried to become 'the next Silicon Valley', but the urgent need for a green transition and a series of other crises (including a pandemic, supply chain collapses, energy and critical resource shortages, and national security threats as well as a surge in demand for chips to power AI) have turned the world's attention back to hardware.

This is a problem in Europe, where some countries stare down the barrel of deindustrialisation. While semiconductor giant ASML is Dutch, the technology is not produced at scale in Europe, nor can the continent rapidly scale up battery production to meet its own demand. Global instability is causing alarm over the geography of supply chains and the complex interdependencies they create between countries which might otherwise see each other as competitors or even threats, with a process of deglobalisation and regionalisation expected to follow.

The European Union's long-term objective of stra-

Geoeconomics, the use of economic policies in pursuit of geopolitical interests, is on the rise: government interventions in the economy have increased dramatically since 2019



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tegic autonomy requires expanding defence capabilities, hastening the green transition, and honing global competitiveness. Its policymakers are shaping a new agenda and hoping companies will rise up to meet it; with the right incentives and enough backing, the idea is that these activities, which are societally important but presently undersupplied, will increase.

That is the defining goal of industrial policy, which has real staying power as one of the hottest debates in economics. That does not make it new: many Western countries used various industrial policies to shore up their economies after World War II and never ended their agricultural subsidies. Notably, industrial policy also has a modern history in Asia. The East and Southeast Asian success stories of the 20th and 21st centuries were largely built on manufacturing, which many of these countries encouraged through tax incentives, favourable loans, selective import tariffs, and subsidies.

China now accounts for 30% of the world's manufacturing, and makes three out of every four lithium-ion batteries produced anywhere. It is the dominant producer of solar panels, by far. None of this was true twenty years ago—this transformation was engineered through the strategic use of industrial policy.

This fact has led to major tensions between China and the European Union, particularly stemming from China's extensive subsidisation of its electric vehicle industry. In October 2024, the EU responded to what it has deemed unfair competition by imposing anti-subsidy duties on Chinese EV companies such as BYD and Geely Group, the latter of which owns majority shares in Swedish car brands Volvo Cars and Polestar. Sweden abstained from voting on the tariff measure, which allows import tariffs of up to 45% on Chinese electric vehicles. Germany, whose own carmakers feared retaliation from China, was one of five countries that voted no.

The return, with a vengeance, of ambitious industrial policies is not without opposition. There is concern about a possible race to the top, in which the winner is the country that can afford to subsidise its industries more heavily than anyone else. On its own, the idea of "picking winners" is not an entirely uncontroversial one, either; if certain sectors—or even certain companies—are being propped up by the government, where does that leave the free market?

In the academic literature, the efficacy of industrial policy has often been called into question in studies that compare sectors supported by industrial policies with those that are not, studies which sometimes find that the former do not always outperform the latter. Never mind the fact that industrial policy is often used to foster infant industries or industries that are at risk of being lost—sometimes the goal of an intervention is not the quantity, but the quality, of GDP growth. Subsidising agriculture is not always economically efficient, but it guarantees food security. In a world of heightened geopolitical volatility, few policymakers seem willing to leave the keys to the house in the hands of market forces.

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