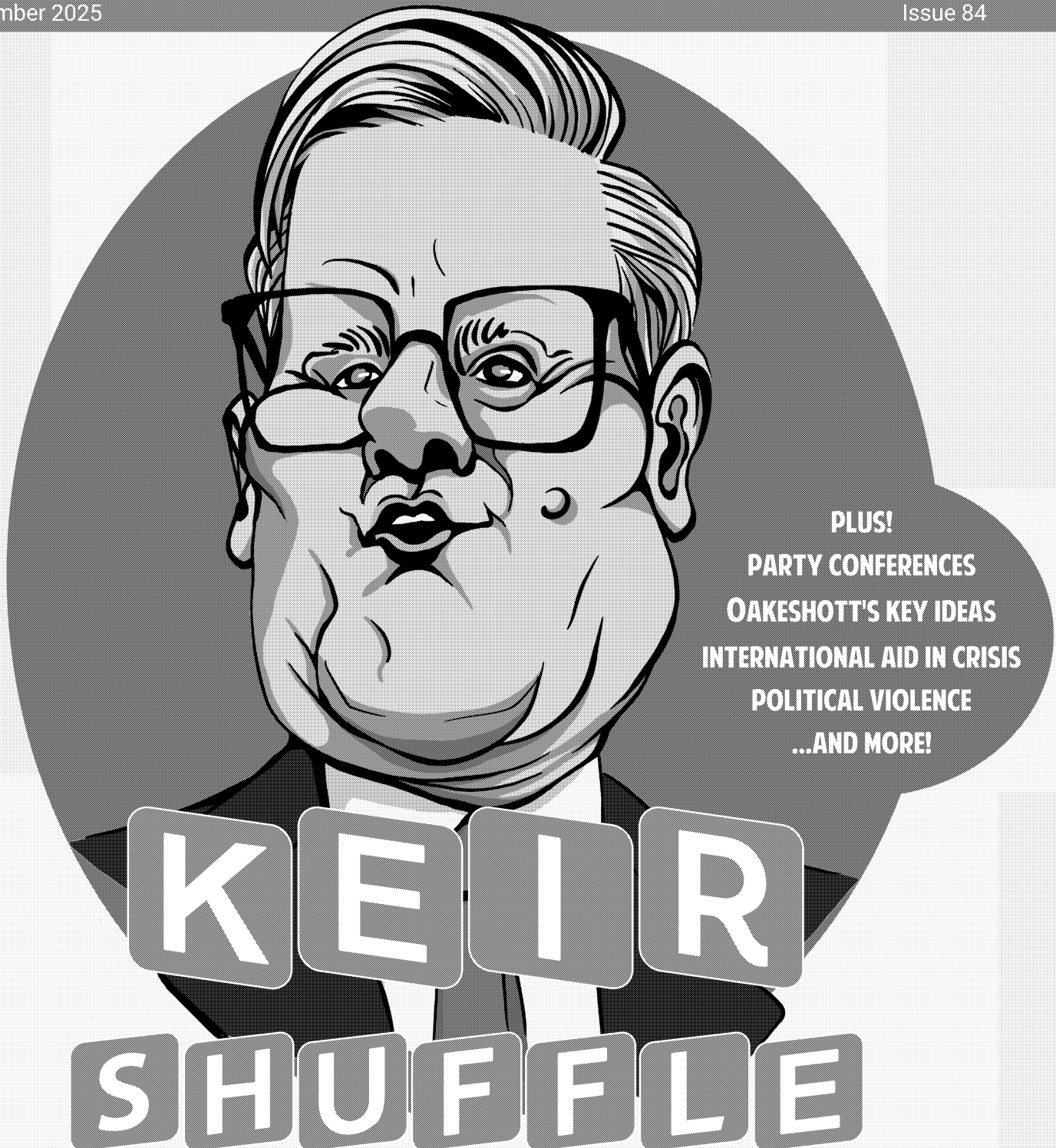


The Think Tank

Up-to-date analysis of exam-relevant issues for A Level Politics

November 2025

Issue 84



PLUS!

PARTY CONFERENCES

OAKESHOTT'S KEY IDEAS

INTERNATIONAL AID IN CRISIS

POLITICAL VIOLENCE

...AND MORE!

KEIR SHUFFLE

IS IT ENOUGH?

Springboard 1

'International law does not work fully if you don't have powerful friends. And even that doesn't work if you don't have weapons. There are no security guarantees. No international institution is capable of stopping the bloodshed. What can countries suffering from war expect from the UN? For decades – only statements.'

▲ Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy addressing the United Nations General Assembly.



Discussion points

1. Do you agree with Zelenskyy that international law is meaningless without force?
2. How different is international law to domestic law? Is force required for law to be effective?
3. Is war and the threat of war simply a fact of life in international relations?
4. What do you think it will take for Russia and Ukraine to be at peace?

Springboard 2

'I would like to acknowledge the critical role of the UK in assisting and coordinating efforts that have led us to the release of the hostages. In particular, I want to recognize the incredible efforts of the National Security Advisor Jonathan Powell.'

▲ Steve Clifford, US Special Envoy to the Middle East, referring to the Gaza peace plan. Jonathan Powell was previously the UK's chief negotiator in the NI peace process. The UK side of the NI peace process was begun under John Major's government and completed under Tony Blair's first Labour government.

'5. Once all hostages are released, Israel will release 250 life sentenced Gazans who were detained after October 7, 2023, including all women in that context. For every Israeli hostage whose remains are released, Israel will release the remains of 15 deceased Gazans.'

6. Once all hostages are returned, Hamas members who commit to peace and decommission their weapons will be given amnesty. Members of Hamas who do not commit to peace will be given safe passage to receiving countries.'

▲ Extract from the Gaza peace plan.

Discussion points

1. Is the UK government too quiet about its positive role in the peace process in Gaza?
2. Do you think Jonathan Powell has played an important role in the peace plan, or is he taking credit for what others have done?
3. Do you think this agreement would have happened sooner or differently with Kofi Annan's involvement?
4. Are peace negotiations ever the work of one person?
5. Will the Gaza peace plan lead to a lasting peace in Israel and Palestine?
6. Will the long-term damage to alliances and reputation become a problem for Israel?

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A Word from the Editor

UK politics was mildly shaken by Angela Rayner's departure, bringing forward a cabinet reshuffle (page 12). It has since settled down into the usual pattern of an autumn of conferences (page 4), but surely the governing party hope that Keir's Shuffle will be the start of a turnaround in public satisfaction with the government.



The New York mayoral election, as we go to print, is to be decided – but Zohran Mamdani stands a strong chance of being a radical candidate and the first Muslim to hold the office. How Trump's administration responds to this election will be instructive for the future. Hopefully our coverage of political violence (page 10) is not too relevant to that result.

Peace in Gaza is shaky at best, elusive at worst. Initially hailed as a victory for Trump's dealmaking – not least by the man himself – it remains to be seen whether the current ceasefire will survive and lead to hope in the region. Our Springboards opposite offer some food for thought on that. Trump's edicts of the year so far are the focus of our Top Ten (page 18).

*We welcome feedback and contributions at SamFrancis@PublishMeNow.co.uk
If you have any ideas for the magazine, or articles you'd like to write, please get in touch!*

Contents

Springboard	2
Political Party Conference Report 2025	4
<i>UK Politics: Political Parties</i>	
300 Words & an Essay: Uncodified Constitution	6
<i>UK Politics: Constitution</i>	
The Key Ideas of Michael Oakeshott	8
<i>Ideologies: Conservatism</i>	
Political Violence in the US	10
<i>US Politics: Partisanship</i>	
The Keir Shuffle	12
<i>UK Politics: UK Executive</i>	
20 Questions	14
International Aid in Crisis	15
<i>Global Politics: Economic Governance</i>	
Profile: Zack Polanski	17
Top Ten: Trump's Executive Orders	18

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Cover illustration of Keir Starmer by Judit Molnar

POLITICAL PARTY CONFERENCE REPORT 20

Angela Mogridge reports on the traditional party conference season.

September heralds a series of unteated events every year – the return to school or college, the post-summer blues, leaves falling from the trees and... political party conferences!

Traditionally held in British seaside resorts or major cities, often in the political heartlands of each party, the conference gives all party members the chance to link up, network, show vocal support (or otherwise) for the party leader and argue over policy before their MPs return to Westminster for the new session.

As every year, this batch of party conferences showcased differing visions for the future of the UK, a reiteration of each party's core values and a response to their shifting political fortunes.

So, what did the grassroots and the senior members of each party get up to at their conference this year?

The Labour Party conference in Liverpool marked its first full year in power since the election win in July 2024. The tone was not quite as celebratory as last year's conference with the emphasis this year being on introspection and consolidation. Sir Kier Starmer's keynote speech focused on delivery rather than rhetoric. Declaring that his government was a 'mission-led government' he introduced five missions that would be the focus for the coming year: economic growth, NHS reform, education system improvement, crime reduction, and climate action. He avoided any radical proposals in a bid to reassure voters and business – only hinting at tax reform to tackle tax avoidance rather than announcing sweeping changes. After having had a year in power it seemed like the party stalwarts had come to terms with the reality of a post-Brexit political climate and were keen to be seen to be realistic and pragmatic rather than ideological.

The Conservative Party conference in London was still dealing with the aftermath of a election loss and a failure to rebuild itself from the last year. With a relatively new party leader, the conference failed to present a coherent vision. Rishi Sunak's keynote speech was muddled and attempted to blend economic libertarianism with cultural conservatism – an attempt that failed to garner united support from the audience. There was a sense of a lack of confidence about the party and about the leader which added to a lacklustre

atmosphere within the party. The focus was on free speech a key theme and promoting a national narrative with the hope of making the party more appealing to UK voters. Economic growth was the focus with the focus being on reducing bureaucratic

With the Labour Party's success and the Con

With a brand-new leader there was a real sense of potential within the Green Party

the aim of increasing investment opportunities

So, nothing dramatic at the party conferences for the Labour Party to garner media and public attention from these

The Scottish National Party conference in Glasgow from recent leaders' departure was confident and optimistic. The call for Scottish independence presented an 'Independence' emphasised the legal case intended to use to achieve as far as to declare the majority in next year's election a mandate to hold a referendum. The SNP also sought to involve the public in the development of public services and investment in education.

Reform UK's party conference was a rally rather than a policy forum. The atmosphere was high-energy and combative with Nigel Farage delighting in taking every opportunity to press the media with a radical soundbite. The main focus was on immigration

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control and UK withdrawal from the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR). Appealing to voters disillusioned by traditional political parties, Reform positioned itself as the voice of 'common sense' and of the 'ordinary man' with attacks on Westminster and the mainstream media central tenets of their anti-establishment rhetoric. Revelling in its role as a disruptor in British politics, the party leader declared that 'we are the party on the rise'. The conference wrapped up with a warning from Farage that the party needed to be prepared to fight the early general election.

Last, but for once not least, the **Green Party** conference was characterised by a fresh enthusiasm for radical policy and grassroots involvement. With a brand-new leader there was a real sense of potential within the party – potential to grab Labour votes, provide an alternative opposition to the Reform Party and to make a lasting impression on the face of British politics. The newly elected Zack Polanski highlighted the need to take advantage of the current political climate to build the party and provide a viable alternative to voters. His keynote speech took the opportunity to attack both the Labour and Reform parties to position the Greens as an alternative to both. Significantly, the Green Party and its leader were unashamed to be bold in their policymaking – especially their call to make the wealthiest pay more tax, with their claim that the UK had been failed by 'a political class

poisoned by extreme views'. The party's stance was reinforced for its strongly worded criticism of the government, labelling Nigel Farage a 'corporate stooge' and warning of a 'managed decline' of the country.

The 2025 political party conference landscape in shifting sands, with the Reform Party's change dramatically reflecting a less emphasis on policy and a more focus on its position within the political arena.

Discussion points

1. What is the primary purpose of party conferences in the UK?
2. How do party conferences reflect the state of party democracy?

Exam-style question

- Evaluate the extent to which the 2025 party conferences reflect the ideological differences between the major political parties.

Angela Mogridge is a retired teacher and writer based in the East Midlands. She has written for the BBC, the Guardian and Politics, Government and Politics. She is also a long-standing contributor to A Level Politics.

Compare at a glance:

Party	Location	Overall tone	Key themes	Target audience
Labour	Liverpool	Introspective; consolidation	Economic growth; cautious reform	Traditional voters
Conservative	Birmingham	Fragmented; low-energy	Tax reform; deregulation; internal unity	Working-class voters
Liberal Democrats	Bournemouth	Optimistic; enthusiastic	Electoral reform; local empowerment; climate action	Religious and liberal voters
SNP	Aberdeen	Calm; focused; optimistic	Scottish independence	Regional voters
Reform UK	Birmingham	High-energy; disruptive	Immigration; anti-establishment	Post-alternative party voters
Green	Bournemouth	Fresh; idealistic	Climate action; social justice; democratic renewal	Environmental and progressive voters

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300 Words & an Essay: constitution still fit for

An exam-style 300-word extract followed by a 250-word essay with examination questions

A constitution is the set of rules and principles by which a state is governed. The UK constitution is highly unusual among Western liberal democracies in being uncodified. It is contained in a single legal document; it derives from different sources of different status, including statute law, case law, conventions and works of authority. This can create a more dynamic and versatile set of rules and laws, but it can also sometimes make the rules inaccessible, contradictory, unclear and even unknowable.

It is also unentrenched – it requires no special procedure for change such as a ‘supermajority’ vote in the legislature (USA) or a referendum (Ireland). This often makes the UK constitution more flexible, and quicker and easier to change and modernise, but – in the wrong hands – it could be *too* easy to change. Citizens’ rights, also unentrenched, can be readily reduced or even removed.

This also means that the UK constitution is non-judicial in the sense that the Westminster Parliament has the final word on it rather than the judiciary. For example, the US Supreme Court has the final word on the constitution, which gives democratically elected and accountable politicians ultimate control over unelected, unrepresentative and largely unaccountable judges – but critics of the judiciary see politicians as more self-interested, power-hungry and even corrupt than independent and impartial judges.

Finally, the UK constitution is said to be unitary, meaning that supreme law-making power rests with a single, central source (Westminster) based on the principle of parliamentary sovereignty – in contrast with many federal systems where sovereignty is shared between central and local power bodies (e.g. USA). Power is, therefore, often concentrated in the hands of whoever controls Parliament. A strong majority government may be effective especially in times of crisis, but it may also risk an overweening ‘elective dictatorship’.

An original commentary written for The Think Tank

- Evaluate the view that the UK constitution is no longer working effectively.
- ‘The UK’s uncodified constitution is no longer adequate.’ Analyse and evaluate this statement.

Edexcel-style (30 marks)

AQA-style (25 marks)

As the source says, the UK constitution is unusual in Western liberal democracies in being uncodified. This essay will argue whether this balance, be better off

The UK’s constitution has evolved over centuries, with no single source of the key rules, which are drawn from a variety of sources. ‘Statute law’ is the sovereign Westminster Parliament, and the other sources, and the courts can enforce them as written or veto them. ‘Case law’ can set precedents for future cases. In 2025 the UK Supreme Court wishes of trans groups. In 2010 Equality Act. ‘Conventions’ are sustained by tradition and can thus be developed and broken just as ministerial responsibility. Ministers such as Rishi Sunak and Matt Hancock. ‘Works of authority’ are the years by eminent scholars like Dicey which seek to explain the constitution – constitutional principles – ‘collective Cabinet government’. Many, especially the organic and political constitution over the centuries. In 1783 expressed his view that the sole authority is that of the monarch. It can readily enable the government to change and cultural values. In the Lords in the 19th century. (Human Rights) Act 2013. In different types of government, they are contradictory. Referendums, for example, have a practical status; and the ‘pillars’ of equality before the law, parliamentary sovereignty over the devolution settlements, are vulnerable – notably to power grabs; and so slow to change, notably the part-hereditary system. The constitution is therefore

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The UK constitution is also unentrenched, requiring no special legal procedure for change, unlike the USA or Ireland, as the source says. The most minor or major changes can therefore be authorised by a one-vote majority in the Commons. Such flexibility is often valued: e.g. the 2010 coalition government could swiftly pass the Fixed-term Parliaments Act 2011 to safeguard its own existence, and a later government in 2022 could equally easily repeal it. However, as the source says, constitutional laws can also be too easy to change. Political rights, also unentrenched, can be easily reduced or even removed. The Justice Secretary Dominic Raab proposed in 2021 to 'overhaul the Human Rights Act (HRA) to stop Strasbourg dictating to us', and Conservative leader Kemi Badenoch currently proposes to leave the ECHR upon which the HRA is based. Any current or future government with a one-vote majority in the Commons could potentially abolish the Human Rights Act, or the Lords, or elections, or even the monarchy. The uncodified constitution risks extreme executive overreach – what Lord Hailsham referred to as 'elective dictatorship'.

The UK constitution is also described as 'non-judicial': because there is no distinct and 'higher' document of enshrined constitutional law for the judges to protect, so Parliament – especially the elected Commons – has the final word on constitutional laws. This is widely seen as a more democratic and accountable system than giving unelected judges the final say. However, its 'democratic' claim is questionable when Westminster's first-past-the-post electoral system usually gives the government a majority of seats in the Commons on a minority of votes in the country. In the 2024 general election, for example, Labour won 63% of the seats on just 34% of the votes cast – which, on the low turnout of 60%, was just 20% of the eligible electorate. Also, politicians may often be more interested in short-term political gain or hanging onto power than in the interests of the country and voters. Historian Peter Hennessy is credited with 'the good chap theory of government' – that the UK constitution and especially its conventions rely upon the power holders acting ethically and decently. But, as others have critically noted, 'decent men can be bastards'. Former PM Boris Johnson tested the principles of the constitution more than most with, for example, his illegal proroguing (suspension) of Parliament, willingness to break domestic and international laws, lying to Parliament, the Queen, 'cronyism and corruption' (PE contracts), Partygate, ignoring

his own ethics advice, and his own code in 2022 to protect integrity, transparency to resign over breaches. Chris Bryant said, 'If [the PM] just rewrite the

1. conclusion: on the lack of political and public rights to be enshrined in the Constitution Unit has argued that codification could be a good idea. We don't need to be asked to do it. We should have a monarch. MP Austin Mitchell has said the UK constitution is not a sacred text and can get away with an unscrupulous government. In an acerbic social media post, he said it undermines public trust. In summary, the UK's constitution is dictated by a minority of the population, dominated by the prime minister, unusual and potentially powerful. It should be a more entrenched constitution.

Examiner's Comments

Most of the source material was relevant, although there was a slight imbalance between 'unitary versus federal' and 'sovereignty through the source, there was no evidence of the candidate's knowledge of the scope for more top-down control or relative significance of the constitution is weak in the questions of change at the end of the essay, but that. There was also no evidenced evaluation of conclusions and well-supported (AO3)

AO1: 9

Moyra Grant is an experienced textbook author.

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Michael Oakeshott

Moyra Grant examines the thought of Michael Oakeshott, a crucial conservative thinker.

Michael Oakeshott (1901–1990) was a traditional English conservative of the old school who witnessed the emergence of the Thatcherite New Right school of thought which currently defines contemporary conservatism. At Cambridge University he studied history and political science, and his views as a young man were influenced by his alarm at the impact of far-right fascism and Nazism across Europe in the 1930s. After the war, he went on to be professor of political science at the LSE for almost twenty years. His personal life was characterised by three wives, many affairs and an illegitimate son. He is known primarily for his dislike of grand theories and doctrinaire ideologies and his preference for tradition, caution and pragmatism, based upon his belief in human imperfection.

‘There is no such thing as human nature’

HUMAN NATURE
Tradition
human
fallible
and psy
seen as

OAKESHOTT'S KEY IDEAS

PRAGMATISM

‘Pragmatism’ is a practical, flexible and limited response to circumstances, relying on history and experience for guidance. Traditional conservatism stresses man’s capacity to reason and act rationally, and therefore mistrusts man’s capacity to be ideal, so it mistrusts abstract credos, preferring the practical to the theoretical and pragmatism to dogmatism. Ideologies, in Oakeshott’s view, were a form of ‘rationalist’ thought which too often embodied utopian fantasies about reshaping society. He saw conservatism instead as an empirical outlook, a natural disposition or ‘habit of mind’ which acted on the basis of concrete observation, circumstances and past events rather than on grand theory. Humans and societies, he said, are unpredictable, and utopian ideals are unattainable: ‘We all sail a boundless and bottomless sea, with no appointed destination’. He argued that people should be suspicious of politicians who seek to pilot the ship – that is, the state – to ‘a port that may not exist’; instead, the person at the helm should simply seek to keep the ship afloat and on an even keel.

In his analysis of politics and the proper role of government, Oakeshott contrasted technical knowledge – ‘knowing what’ – with traditional knowledge – ‘knowing how’. Politics, he said, should be a limited activity and government should be an empirical art. The laws of state and norms of society should denote how people should act but not what their goals should be. In his work *On Human Conduct* (1975) Oakeshott asserted two modes of governance: he rejected ‘enterprise association’ where the state sought to impose any supreme collective purpose on society such as racial purity, equality or profit (whether premised on ‘science’, ‘perfection’ or ‘rationalism’) which

he said, threatened instead to lead to totalitarianism. Instead, he favoured a society where the laws merely ‘define the order’ which impose orderliness. The proper role of the state was to ‘ensure security and stability rather than create the good’ – a role far less noble, but no worse than the disease it was shaped by his scepticism.

imperfect and imperfectly knowable. Oakeshott, however, was clear on one point: he argued against the idea of human nature, arguing that individuals make choices rather than being determined by nature. In *The Voice of Liberal Learning* (1989) he actually wrote ‘There is no such thing as human nature’ – perhaps being deliberately provocative, because he certainly did believe that humans lacked wisdom and that this was one key reason why abstract theories and designs wouldn’t work. He also

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believed that humans are psychologically insecure, craving rootedness, identity and stability (hence, for example, the traditional conservative mistrust of cultural diversity, immigration and multiculturalism). One of his most famous quotes says, 'To be conservative is to prefer the familiar to the unknown, the tried to the untried, fact to mystery, the actual to the possible, the limited to the unbounded, the near to the distant, the sufficient to the superabundant, the convenient to the perfect, present laughter to utopian bliss'.

Thus, he did not share the neo-liberal faith in rationalism, calling it 'a misconception which is based on the nature of human knowledge'. He also rejected Hobbes' pessimism about human nature, saying that people were 'imperfect but not immoral... fallible but not terrible'. As he put it, life without the state and its laws would be 'not so much nasty, brutish and short... as noisy, foolish and flawed'. In this and other ways, Oakeshott is in some ways outside of the mainstream of traditional conservatism – and, of course, far removed from the ideological drive of the New Right.

TRADITION

One thing which all conservatives share is a strong endorsement of private ownership of land, homes and businesses; but unlike neo-liberals who see this as a natural right, political conservatives justify it in terms of tradition and are pragmatic about whether the economy should be a free market or a mixed economy. One-nation conservatives favour a mixed economy on the grounds that paternalist welfare is both a principled duty and a compassion for the hapless poor by the 'natural order' of the organic society – *noblesse oblige* – and a pragmatic safeguard against serious social unrest, which was Oakeshott's perspective.

THE IMPACT OF OAKESHOTT'S IDEAS

Oakeshott's traditional conservative pragmatism had strong influence in the UK Conservative Party during the post-war period, notably during the premierships of Harold Macmillan and Ted Heath. However, traditional and especially one-nation Tories (such as former 'big beasts' like Michael Heseltine and Ken Clarke) have been marginalised as New Right influence has grown. ■

APPLYING OAKESHOTT

CASE STUDY 1: CONSERVATIVE PRAGMATISM

Through a rapid succession of governments in recent years, the party has pursued policies of free market, 'small state', etc. This was especially evident in its limited tenure in 2022 with its largely unfunded tax cuts.

WHAT WOULD OAKESHOTT SAY?

Oakeshott would have been critical of the ideologically driven approach that has shattered the party's traditional compromise, compounded political instability and may be significant that the party's disregard for tradition was a factor in the loss of the prestigious award.

CASE STUDY 2: PATERNALISM

There has been a surge in support for the world among governing parties, including the Reform UK party, and opinion polls. Its nationalistic stance on Brexit to oppose immigration is sometimes with undercurrents of racism.

WHAT WOULD OAKESHOTT SAY?

Oakeshott had an instinct for continuity and family traditions. However, he would have been critical of nationalism as it has become a tool for generating damaging social division in society as well as alienating traditional conservatives. He would have been critical of the populist portrayal of him.

Discussion points

1. In what ways were Oakeshott's ideas principles as well as pragmatism?
2. In what ways does the Conservative Party still adhere to Oakeshott's ideas?

Exam-style questions

- Analyse and evaluate the extent to which conservatives are pragmatic, ideological, with reference to thinkers that you have studied.
- Evaluate the view that conservatism is now more commonly understood as pragmatism.

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POLITICAL

VIOLENCE

IN THE US

Graham Gooch explains how you can make sense of the recent upsurge in violent and th study of US politics and government.

Many commentators have noted that political violence, although tragically a long-established feature of US politics, has increased in recent years. The shooting of right-wing activist and debater **Charlie Kirk** on a university campus in September 2025 is the latest in a series of actual or attempted assassinations. During the 2024 presidential election campaign, Donald Trump faced two failed attempts on his life by gunmen. Violence has had both left-wing and right-wing targets. In June 2025 Democrat Melissa Hortman, former Speaker of the Minnesota House of Representatives, her husband and family dog were shot dead. Another lawmaker from the same party, John Hoffman, was wounded along with his wife on the same day.



Melissa Hortman

These assaults all involved firearms, but there have been other types of violence. The most notorious event was the January 2021 Capitol riot, when demonstrators tried to block the ratification of Joe Biden's election as President, resulting in five deaths and many injuries. The following year, a breach of the US Capitol by rioters led to the death of former House Speaker Nancy Pelosi's husband, resulting in his skull being fractured.

Parallels have been drawn with the 1960s, when President John F Kennedy, his brother Robert, and civil rights activists Malcolm X and Martin Luther King were all assassinated. The environment feels more menacing now. There is a greater readiness among political partisans to

see no good in their own side. The rise of political violence has encouraged the spread of extreme viewpoints under the banner of free speech. It has facilitated the spread of conspiracy theories. There is extensive discussion of a 'deep state' in which a small group of officials allegedly usurp the power of the elected government. Another worrying development is the suggestion that a significant portion of the population is so polarised that political violence is inevitable.

The rise of political violence has also led to a question on the polarisation of the debate over the role of pressure groups such as the National Rifle Association and arguments around gun control.

VIOLENCE POLITICS

Mainstream US politicians have often accused their opponents, while ignoring their own political movements for violence. Although the shooting of Kirk was the work of a lone gunman, it is also the result of the influence of the far-right and the increased tensions. Trump's administration has been seen as decreasing a crackdown on domestic terrorism and involvement in 'domestic terrorism' (antifa) movements of expression. Some argue that it is a decentralised movement, but it is not clear how a ban on

Profile: Charlie Kirk

Kirk was an activist and founder of Turning of the Tides, which promotes conservative university campus activism. He was a supporter of Donald Trump and a right-wing Christian. He was shot at Utah State University.

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Meanwhile Trump has announced the deployment of the **National Guard** to uphold order in Democrat-run cities such as Chicago, despite the protests of state governors and mayors. He has spoken of these areas as providing military 'training grounds'. Trump has pursued the prosecution of old enemies such as James Comey, former FBI director, who angered him by investigating possible Russian involvement in the 2016 presidential election. These moves have spread alarm among Democrats. Trump's critics have argued that he is using the threat posed by political violence as a cover for creating an authoritarian state.

CONSTITUTIONAL RIGHTS AND PRESSURE GROUPS

Another angle for you to examine is the power of the gun rights lobby, who base their case on an interpretation of the Second Amendment – the well-known right to bear arms. Ironically, Charlie Kirk was shot while answering a question about guns. The Second Amendment is a bone of contention between conservatives and liberals. The former view it as straightforwardly sanctioning an individual's right to carry a firearm. Liberals, on the other hand, point to the clause which links gun ownership to membership of a militia. They argue that the right is a qualified one, linked to a particular social context.

The 2008 Supreme Court ruling in *DC v Heller* lent support to the pro-gun cause. In this landmark case, the Court declared that individuals have the right to keep arms in their own homes, unconnected with service in a militia. It overturned a requirement, imposed by local authorities in Washington DC, that legally owned firearms must be kept unloaded and disassembled or in a private residence. Since then, annual gun deaths in the US have increased from 9 million to 11 million. Critics argue that the Second Amendment indirectly encourages political violence by making it easier for potentially dangerous individuals to get hold of a firearm.

Another factor is the role of the National Rifle Association (NRA), a powerful pressure group which uses its influence with members of Congress to hamper the passage of stricter gun control laws. Although troubled by recent lawsuits, the NRA is still a formidable force. Its rating of Congressional candidates from A to F, based on their attitude towards the Second Amendment, affects the outcome of elections. The NRA also mobilises impressive levels of funding in support of its lobbying activities. Public outrage following school shootings – such as those at Sandy Hook, Connecticut in 2012, or Uvalde, Texas, in 2022 – has temporarily damaged its image, but its focus tends to move on. For these reasons, gun law reform is hard to achieve in the US.

The Second Amendment: a regulated Militia, the security of a free State, to keep and bear Arms. It forms part of the amendments of the Constitution in 1791.

Executive order: a decree which orders a government to take a particular action.

National Guard: a force deployed by the President always with the approval of Congress in response to a domestic emergency.

Discussion points

1. There have been several politicians, such as Cory Booker in 2016 and Kamala Harris in 2021. Nonetheless, gun ownership in the UK are lower than in the US.
2. Does the debate over the Second Amendment suggest that the US is not suited to today's political climate?

Question in the style of

- Evaluate the views of the two political parties. You should also consider the alternative to the current situation.

Dr Graham Goodlad teaches History and is a co-author of the Pearson BTEC Level 3 National in Citizenship and Government.

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THE KE SHUFFLE

Starmar's Reshuffle

Full of both opportunities and traps for the ministers, would-be ministers, and the Prime Minister. But how impactful was this one? Moyra

Why do prime ministers (and other party leaders) periodically 'reshuffle' their senior teams? Sometimes a change of personnel is forced upon a PM because a minister chooses to resign or has to be sacked over policy or personal failure. More often, reshuffles are planned and purposeful events. They are used to remove dead wood, disloyal colleagues or sheer embarrassments from government office – or to redeploy a minister to a different and more suitable post. They also create opportunities to bring in new blood – a prospect which helps to keep backbench MPs (usually ambitious for promotion) motivated and loyal. However, all PMs need to be wary of reshuffling their teams too often, because it creates an unsettling perception of instability and chaos and media will also question a PM's competence in appointing too many unsuitable ministers in the first place.

What prompted PM Starmer's **RESHUFFLE**?

Starmer's September reshuffle was originally intended to be relatively minor, involving just a few junior ministers and backroom officials (although interestingly, that included the creation of a wholly new and potentially powerful Cabinet post of Chief Secretary to the Prime Minister, in which Darren Jones now has oversight of policy delivery right across government). However, the departure of Starmer's deputy PM Angela Rayner prompted a major reorganisation of his ministerial team. After weeks of media and opposition questions about Rayner's purchase of a Sussex flat in May, she referred herself to the PM's ethics adviser and was ruled to have broken the ministerial code by an inadvertent failure to pay enough towards her flat. She promptly resigned all her offices (she was also deputy party leader and Home Secretary).

Starmer's key ministerial **MOVES**

In Starmer's extensive reshuffle, David Lammy replaced Rayner as deputy PM, Yvette Cooper took over from Lammy as Foreign Secretary, and Shabana Mahmood took

over from Cooper as Home Secretary. An example of a ministerial reshuffle in the current government, but some of the more comprehensive clearances by media commentators. Unhappy with the delay in the issue of immigration. Not quick to make her mark. Police powers against regular pro-Palestine. Have effectively had the Act 1986. Another appointed Secretary of Technology, while the replaced her as Work and Pensions. Andrew Marr in 7 who described Starmer

Former leader of the Conservative Party, apparently without explanation about it. She then stood

'There is no fire, no passion, no vision – we are timid and flat-footed.'

– Labour staffer

There were also new faces in the ministers, with Starmer's number – of the 2022 government. Perhaps also punished: not on threatened rebellion after given a ministerial role

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The PM's extensive patronage powers were further evidenced by Starmer promising a peerage to Grimsby businessman (and co-owner of Grimsby Town Football Club) Jason Stockwood in order to bring him into government as investment minister. In the UK system of parliamentary government, all ministers must sit in Parliament, and Stockwood duly received his peerage a few days later.

Is Starmer's Leadership in PERIL?

Labour – and Starmer himself – have been falling steadily in the polls since the 2023 general election, with party supporters unhappy with policies such as cuts in winter fuel and disability payments (which resulted in forced and tardy U-turns), increasing arms to Israel, refusing to rejoin the EU single market or customs union, and proposing compulsory digital ID. Crucially, the UK economy is still in the doldrums and voters are still feeling the pain of the cost-of-living crisis since 2021. The Labour government has sought to appeal to Reform UK voters with more draconian policies against immigrants and pro-Palestine protesters. Meanwhile, the Liberal Democrats and the Green Party – now with a new, media-savvy leader in Zack Polanski – have been presenting a growing challenge on the left. By October, the polls had Reform UK well ahead of the pack with both Labour and the Conservatives languishing on under 20% support.

Labour members also say that their government has been too reticent in talking up their policy successes such as enhanced workers' and renters' rights, the Hillsborough Law, free breakfast clubs in primary schools, and a deal with France, winning over Boris Johnson and starting to renationalise the Channel Tunnel. Starmer often says that 'it's difficult to know what Labour now stands for, and Starmer himself has admitted, 'We haven't always told our story as well as we should'. He is not helped in this by a widely right-leaning and unfriendly media.

Starmer's personal leadership style is seen as another problem: it is perceived as pragmatic and sensible but also as 'lawyerly', managerial and uninspiring. As one staffer put it, 'There is no fire, no passion, no vision – we are timid and flat-footed.' The PM is also sometimes accused of poor judgement – notably in appointing arch-Blairite Peter Mandelson as ambassador to the US despite warnings from ministers, the security services and even Mandelson himself about his relationship with convicted child sex offender Jeffrey Epstein. Starmer was forced to sack Mandelson in September over this scandal and may now have created a new and significant enemy.

Meanwhile, Manchester's Labour mayor Andy Burnham – who has never hidden his ambition to be party leader (having stood and lost in the 2015 and 2020 leadership elections) – is going all out against Starmer in September by doing the rounds with his own policy agenda before and during the Labour conference. However, he is

not a Westminster parliamentary government prime minister – and his position is not as difficult. Burnham has urged party members to have patience, far, too early. And, of course, the same systemic cost-of-living black hole, populist opposition, and the need to confront Starmer.

Meanwhile, Starmer has given a well-received keynote speech at the conference which did a lot to soothe nerves and reminded the party that he has no intention of going back to the opposition.

CONCLUSION

The sheer scale of Starmer's Cabinet in new jobs – without further significant reshuffles – suggests that he will be hoping for a supportive performance from his ministers. His stance on immigration is above – immigration is a key issue that he (like Kemi Badenoch) is pulling his party further towards mounting electoral threat. Supporters fear that he is heading in the wrong direction, as the Liberal Democrats have already benefited from the left of UK politics by winning the 2024 general election. Building on their success, they are building on their success, an advantage that Labour is not prone to regicide to topple a leader. The majority and Starmer are now. That said, all parties are in anticipation or trepidation.

Discussion points

1. What are the advantages and disadvantages of reshuffles for those in and out of government?
2. Are reshuffles indicative of a government's strength or weakness?

Exam-style questions

- Evaluate the view that Starmer is as powerful as is suggested by the media.
- Analyse and evaluate the impact of the appointment of Peter Mandelson as ambassador to the US.

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20 Questions

Twenty hints to test your knowledge or to play 'twenty questions' with a class



1. I was born in Stepney in London to teenage parents.
2. My grandfather went to prison for armed robbery.
3. I studied History at Cambridge University.
4. I was president of the National Union of Students for two years.
5. I was head of education at the LGBT pressure group Stonewall.
6. In 2010 I won a by-election to join Redbridge Council.
7. I was elected as MP for Ilford North in 2015.
8. I campaigned for Remain in the 2016 EU referendum and was arrested.
9. I am a Labour Party politician.
10. I was a critic of Jeremy Corbyn's handling of Brexit.
11. I supported Owen Smith's leadership challenge against Corbyn.
12. I supported Jess Phillips for the 2020 Labour leadership.
13. I joined Keir Starmer's shadow cabinet in 2020.
14. I took a brief break from frontlining politics to be treated for cancer.
15. In 2023 I published a memoir: *One Boy, Two Bills*.
16. I am gay.
17. I am an Anglican Christian.
18. I nearly lost my seat to a Gaza independent in the 2022 election.
19. In 2024 I spoke in favour of separate hospital wards for trans people.
20. I became Secretary of State for Health and Social Care after the 2024 election.

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International Aid in Crisis

One aspect of the changing global stage and shrinking away from the liberal world order examines the causes and consequences.

In the 2023 fiscal year the United States distributed a total of between \$62 and 72 billion in foreign aid – roughly the same as the sum of the next three biggest donors – Germany, Japan and the United Kingdom. While this is an enormous figure, and one largely repeated year on year, it does only represent 0.24% of the US Gross National Income for that year. Despite this, inevitably the impact of US foreign aid is huge and significantly affects the global economy. The largest beneficiaries of this aid in 2023 were Ukraine, Israel, Ethiopia and Jordan.

The aid given by the United States to developing countries can be categorised as military, economic, humanitarian or developmental. This aid funds such things as the provision of weapons, governmental loans, emergency help during natural disasters, and basic necessities such as food, clean water and shelter in refugee camps.

The proportion of dollars that are distributed in each category are usually a reflection of the politics of the incumbent governing party at the time. Military aid, the provision of weapons and security assistance, accounted for 33% of the US aid budget in 2023 for example. The nation mainly distributes its aid through an umbrella government agency known as the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) which manages aid projects across 141 countries.

In addition to the obvious often life-saving benefits of such aid, the US, in common with other donor countries, use the provision of aid as a way of strengthening their **soft power** in a region. The use of the carrot (much-needed aid) rather than the stick (coercion) enables the US to build political coalitions in sensitive regions such as the Middle East, as well as influence governments around the world. This enhances both national and international security – stable governments relying on foreign aid are arguably less likely to succumb to terrorism and other threats to global security. Added to this is the view that providing foreign aid helps to promote American values in the beneficiary countries and regions. Projects which promote democracy and good governance are often prioritised when deciding where to distribute USAID.

Of course, the benefits there is significant for countries and on a global scale improvements in health and infectious disease. It has saved the lives of up to 1.6 million people every year by targeted

Public and political support is a partisan issue – with more support from liberals than conservatives. In 2023, Biden began to turn away from aid, and many citizens over the years have seen money goes to USAID. A February 2025 found that the USA spent on foreign aid (a substantial amount). Opinions such as that support a reduction in

America First

During Donald Trump's presidency, that his 'America First' policy led to spending of taxpayer money on Americans first and foremost. It would be on reducing foreign aid, especially with those economic views did not align. On his first day of his second term, Trump issued an **executive order** ending the United States Foreign Aid. This ended US foreign aid in line with America First. It aligned with American values, antithetical to American values. He immediately froze all US foreign aid. On 27th January 2025 all US foreign aid was put on compulsory leave. The newly created Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE) stated that it would review all US Lawsuits were filed against the government, numerous affected by government action, but that following a stop to the programmes (5,200 c

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28th August 2025 the developing world woke to the potentially devastating news that President Trump had used a '**pocket rescission**' to cancel \$4.9 billion of planned US aid. This was communicated by the Office of Management and Budget, perhaps predictably through social media with this X post:

'Last night, President Trump CANCELLED \$4.9 billion in American Last foreign aid using pocket rescission. @POTUS always put AMERICA FIRST'

By 26th September 2025 the Supreme Court had ruled in favour of the US government to allow the reductions.

One of the most immediate impacts of the withdrawal of USAID funding was felt around humanitarian aid. Refugee camps, conflict zones and developing countries rely heavily on American aid for basic necessities such as clean water, food and medical supplies. A freeze, and then withdrawal of funds has led to a lack of access to maternity health services and HIV and malaria treatment for example. In Yemen, millions of people have been left at risk of starvation and disease. In addition, withdrawal of financial contributions to the World Health Organization (WHO) has raised concerns about the organisation's continued ability to track disease outbreaks, run vaccination programmes and lead on public health initiatives.

There are also significant strategic and security risks associated with the cut in funding. Foreign aid has long been the cornerstone of US policy across the world. By investing in international development, the US has been able to build alliances, promote stability and counter extremist ideologies. With a reduction in USAID there is a real risk of a power vacuum leaving the US weak internationally and giving opportunities to China and Russia to fill the void. While the US prides itself on championing stable government and the development of democracy in return for its financial aid, China and Russia are less likely to have such caveats attached to the giving of their foreign aid and may act in a more transactional manner with less transparency and accountability. ■

KEY TERMS ?

Soft power: The use of persuasion, diplomacy and incentives to influence global relations in contrast to hard power – the use of force, threat or coercion.

Executive order: A directive issued by the president which is binding on the executive branch.

Pocket rescission: Similar to a pocket veto, when a president asks Congress to cancel allocated funds very close to the end of the financial (fiscal) year effectively allowing the funds to expire without congressional approval. The difference is that a pocket veto is allowed constitutionally while a pocket rescission is an unconstitutional act.

Case Study

The small, landlocked country of Lesotho has the highest HIV infections. With little aid from the developed world, Lesotho has managed to build a health system which has helped to control the epidemic in the country.

However, within a year of the freezing of foreign aid, the health system has all but collapsed. HIV programmes aimed at reducing transmission and supporting at-risk groups were cut, and health professionals left the country where the population (11%) is 90% HIV positive.

The impact on HIV/AIDS was felt across the world. The United Nations HIV prevalence estimates that 4 million people died from HIV/AIDS because of the lack of funding.

Discussion points

1. What role does US foreign aid play in the world? What would happen if American aid was cut? What role would the world have in filling the gap?
2. What consequences would reductions in US foreign aid have on humanitarian efforts and development?
3. To what extent has the withdrawal of aid undermined international development?

Exam-style question

- American foreign aid: power: discuss.

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Profile: Zack Polanski

Age: 42**Ideology:** Eco-socialist**Nationality:** British**Career:** Green Party leader

Personal Profile

Zack Polanski was born David Paulden in Salford in 1982. At 18, keen to embrace his Jewish heritage, he reverted to his original family name which his grandfather had abandoned to avoid antisemitism. He attended Stockport Grammar School on a scholarship and went to Aberystwyth University, then worked as a hypnotherapist. He now lives with his partner in Hackney.

He was a Liberal Democrat for some years but joined the Green Party in 2017, was elected to the London Assembly in 2021 (he is not an MP) and was elected deputy party leader a year later. He won the Green Party leadership election this September by a wide margin. He describes himself as an 'eco-populist' and seeks to turn the Green Party into a left-wing version of Reform UK. When he appeared on October on BBC's *Question Time* with Reform's Zia Yusuf, sparks flew. Polanski is very media-savvy and regularly produces short, incisive videos flagging up his party's radical policies. These include a wealth tax, the introduction of a universal basic income, renationalisation of water companies, unilateral nuclear disarmament, withdrawal from Nato, electoral reform and 'calling out the genocide in Gaza'. Unlike many radical left-wingers who oppose the EU as a capitalist club, Polanski is an advocate of rejoining. His political message is similar to that of the nascent party of Jeremy Corbyn and Zarah Sultana, and neither group has ruled out some kind of pact. Polanski wants his party to target Labour constituencies, telling Labour, 'We are here to replace you'.

This gay, Jewish vegan has helped take the party up to 13% in the polls and over 100,000 members, a rise of 55% since Polanski's election. He promises to 'work every single day to deliver environmental, social, racial and economic justice'.

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TOP 10

Executive Orders: Trump's Second Term

Richard L. ... visits executive orders, which we also covered in ... first term (issue 32, February 2017).
[Editor's note: We are judging 'top' here in terms of political impact; it is not an endorsement of the policies.]

Executive orders are now a familiar and expected source of presidential power. Despite not being explicitly given in the Constitution they have emerged as an accepted norm, justified under the vagueness of Article 2 which asserts 'executive power shall be vested in a President of the United States'. Executive orders are an official order signed by the President having the force of law. Trump's use of executive orders in his second term is nothing new, but he has already exceeded his first term total of 220. He signed 26 on his first day back in office and by the time his first 100 days was being assessed he had wiggled his thick black pen 141 times. Below is a survey of the top ten. Whittling down to just ten was difficult with at least 100 of the bunch having either significant merit on a discernible group or really being and is something significant about the Trump administration and its intentions. ... controversy, a surprising number do ... reflect Republican Party traditional concerns and priorities.

1. Ending a 'ridiculous situation' for beverage drinkers

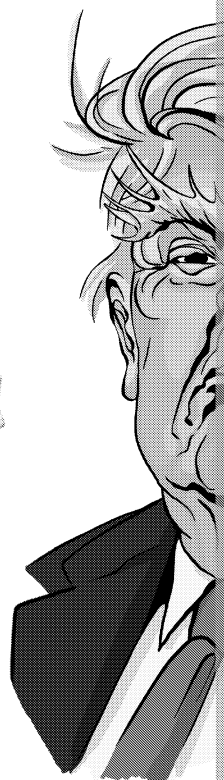
In terms of significance, the executive order banning paper straws and insisting on a return to plastic does not seem like a big deal; but I include it here at the expense of others due to what it shows about the power itself – it is absolute, there is nothing that cannot be forced in an executive order, and it shows also just how narrowly focused the power can be. When Trump decided 'these things don't work', that they even 'explode' and that he wanted to end the 'ridiculous situation' for his fellow citizens suffering a soggy straw – it was done with the stroke of a pen.

2. Ending the immoral discrimination in federal de

This executive order ... administration was fe ... inclusion policies, affi ... many groups past and ... in education and em ... the plane crash in Was ... wildfires in California ... different groups rat ... favoured in employ ... appreciated gender an ... is no longer an accep ... can be traced back to ... Johnson has long bee ... have had little sympat

3. Righting the 'stolen' 2020

Trump wasted no time ... commute the sentenc ... Capitol riots which acc ... 'ends a grave national ... upon the American p ... begins a process of ... incredibly popular wi ... unanimously celebrat ... especially where viol ... that day seems to ha ... relation to some that



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4. Ending government 'waste' and 'inefficiency'

Bringing his then good friend and supporter Elon Musk into the White House, Trump's creation of DOGE (Department of Government Efficiency) was intended to end billions of dollars of waste. The seemingly arbitrary cutting across federal programmes and initiatives has had an impact across areas like education, welfare and health, impacting millions of federal employees and Americans who were in receipt of services and provisions that are no longer funded. The traditional republican desire to 'roll back' or 'shrink' the size of the Federal Government can be seen here. 'The mission' of the man', Musk, was not welcomed by all, 'the mission' had much support from many in the republican fold.

5. Take 'all necessary steps to facilitate the closure' of the Education Department

The Education Department has been a particular target for the administration based on the belief that it has, over time, been pushing a far too liberal line and indoctrinating the future of America with overtly left-wing tendencies which have served to divide society. While this is at complete odds with the fact that it does not dictate content and curriculums at all, the attack is also a fiscal one with the department being seen as one of the most unwanted, unnecessary and unproductive. An obvious target for the DOGE chain of command, Congress could actually abolish the Education Department, so Trump's order can only cut and hinder. This move too fits into the traditional republican mould, especially around federalism, with republicans most inclined to move towards New Federalism and transfer as much power over policy, like education, to the States themselves.

6. Don't let 'the greatest con job ever' hold us back

Trump was clear in his climate change scepticism in his first term and has doubled down on it in his second – shown in his description of climate change as 'the greatest con job ever' at his United Nations address a few weeks ago. Trump immediately left the Paris climate agreement (again – he did the same in his first term, reversed by Biden) and among others, revoked another Biden order aimed at increasing the rate of production of electric vehicles. While mainstream media might not be so bold as to call it a 'con job', willingness to allow environmental concerns to hinder economic activity is in line with a traditional republican view.

7. 'Restoring'

The order to rename the Secretary of Defense the current world class Secretary of Defense (the warrior ethos' and where it 'won' rather than the Department of War for change back rather than suggestion that the including the Second Department of War and 1947 since it changed that this marks a more 'Words matter', Heg Republicans tradition more 'hawkish' way, so of the executive to investigate the best change to make it off republican support is

8. Withdraw Health Organ

Trump has sought to re so this is a bit of a 'pi agreement – Trump c again citing 'unfairly c the Covid pandemic a and Chinese contributi scepticism and asser vaccines, fluoride, par fostered by the Secret

9. A bit of a r Gulf of Mexic

Nothing shows the A executive order to ren of America. While it everyone else, official and indeed many m region will make the c suggestions that Green USA and that Canada 51st State, this execut world and the USA's d

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10. The Fourteenth Amendment need not apply?

The list of ten executive orders could have been a top ten relating to immigration as many of the hundreds of orders are, even if not directly. Trump's hard line on illegal immigration has been clear across a range of areas and across a range of executive orders past and present. A border wall with Mexico was instructed via executive order in his first term, and into his second term executive orders 'to protect the American people from invasion' have been signed (affecting the operations of ICE). The executive order regarding drug cartels as 'foreign terrorist organisations' indirectly relates to immigration too, with illegal immigrants the people the administration

diagnosed as the bulk of the problem. The executive order denying entry to illegal immigrants is as it contradicts the Fourteenth Amendment is clearly in the United States. The citizens thereof, are citizens of the United States. The challenge to this seems to be that the government might not view recent immigrants as necessary and proper for the country. This is a staple as is the policies that have sought to control immigrant groups. ■

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Introduce a National Education Service to limit prime ministerial power

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