



UK Politics

Who supports and opposes a lower voting age?

1.1.2 – A wider franchise and debates over suffrage

1.2 – Political parties

2.2.3 – The legislative process

The government's Representation of the People Bill passed second reading in the House of Commons on Monday, meaning that the first hurdle to 16- and 17-year-olds being enfranchised has been passed.

The Bill passed comfortably – despite an attempt by the Conservative opposition to prevent the bill being read a second time – with the backing of 410 MPs and just 105 opposed. The Conservative attempt to prevent a second reading was backed by Reform UK, as well as the DUP and TUV from Northern Ireland.

Whilst the bill makes a number of changes to the way elections and voting are conducted – including how electors are registered to vote and tighter rules on political donations – it is the lowering of the voting age that constitutes the most significant change being proposed and has attracted the most divided opinions. In welcoming the government's proposals, James Naish (Lab, Rushcliffe) described the measure as 'a statement of confidence in the next generation'. Conversely, Peter Bedford (Con, Mid Leicestershire) said, "It is quite frankly absurd to grant children the right to vote".

Arguments in favour of lowering the voting age centre on democratic inclusion and fairness, pointing to the different ways 16- and 17-year-olds contribute to society already. The proposed change, it was argued, would encourage political engagement and participation, as well as build on the precedent already set in Scotland and Wales at a devolved level. By contrast, opponents of the change note that under-18s are already restricted from a multitude of things and argue that enfranchising them would itself create inconsistency.

A concern around 'family voting' – the practice whereby older family members accompany younger voters to polling

booths and influence them to vote a certain way – was also raised, following on from accusations in the aftermath of the Gorton and Denton by-election. The suggestion is that lowering the voting age puts young people at risk of coming under undue pressure from family members.

In addition to support from Labour, the bill was backed by the Lib Dems, the SNP, Greens, Plaid, SDLP and *Your Party*. As well as supporting lowering the voting age, several progressive parties – and some government backbenchers – also called on the government to give consideration to a reform of the voting system. The bill will now move to committee stage and be considered by a Public Bill Committee.



How did the opposition respond to events in the Middle East?

1.2 - Political parties

Following the prime minister's statement to the Commons on Monday 2 March, opposition parties had the opportunity to make their view on events clear, highlighting the different attitudes and priorities of parties across the chamber.

Conservatives

Conservative speakers were consistently critical of the government's response, arguing stronger and clearer support for allies was needed. Kemi Badenoch said the Prime Minister should have acted sooner and asked: "why it took Iranian missiles hitting allies in the Gulf before he finally made a decision." She stressed solidarity with allies and the need for clarity: "we also stand behind America taking this necessary action." Sir Edward Leigh echoed calls for prioritising national interest over international law, while Sir Andrew Mitchell challenged the Government's legal caution, arguing it hampers action against threats: "those who seek to use international law to constrain us... leave tyrants and murderers in place."

Liberal Democrats

Lib Dem MPs stressed concern about legality, unclear objectives, and risk of mission creep. Sir Ed Davey called the initial US action "unilateral and unlawful" and asked whether the Prime Minister had "demanded ... Trump's plan for what comes next". He warned that defensive operations must not "become offensive". Tim Farron questioned the "exit strategy" of allied action, asking: "what is their plan and what are their objectives?"

Scottish National Party (SNP)

SNP MP Stephen Gethins drew on historical lessons, saying "the ghosts of Iraq hang heavy" and emphasised the importance of the international rules-based order and learning from instability after Iraq. The SNP's focus was on long-term consequences, diplomacy, and de-escalation rather than military escalation.

Reform UK

Reform UK's Richard Tice directly challenged the Government's restraint, arguing that the US and Israel "have done the west a huge, huge favour in degrading the military capability of this terrible regime." He accused the Prime Minister of humiliating the UK on the world stage by refusing initial support. Danny Kruger said the government's position was "moral weakness... unable to take a sovereign decision without consulting international lawyers".

Green Party of England and Wales

Green MP Dr Ellie Chowns strongly criticised both US/Israeli strikes and UK response, calling the attacks "deeply irresponsible and illegal", and asked the Prime Minister to "publish the legal advice ... and commit to a vote in this House on any UK involvement." Her intervention reflected a broader Green scepticism about military escalation and emphasis on legality, opposition to war, and democratic oversight.

The range of responses to the government's statement highlights the challenges it faces – from those seeking assurances that the UK does not get drawn into a long-term war, whilst others accuse the government of timidity and failing to support its allies in the United States.

UK Government

What role has the UK military played in the Middle East and what is the role of Parliament in this?

2.3.1 – The Structure, Role and Powers of the Executive

Last week, like governments across the world, the British Government had to decide how they would respond and what role, if any, they would play in the situation. Initially, the British Government were keen to stress that they were not involved in any military action. Indeed, they briefed the media that they had prevented the US from using UK military bases to strike. However, as the situation developed, Keir Starmer confirmed British forces were actively deployed in what he described as a defensive role:

“Our forces are active and British planes are in the sky today as part of coordinated regional defensive operations to protect our people, our interests and our allies – as Britain has done before, in line with international law”

As would be expected given the enormity of events, Parliament discussed this on Monday when Keir Starmer gave a Ministerial Statement followed by X minutes of questions. However, Parliament was not able to vote on the deployment of military forces. This is because the deployment of military forces is a royal prerogative power. As the power emanates from the monarch, not Parliament, Parliament does not have the constitutional right to be consulted on the use of military forces. In some cases, Prime Minister's have voluntarily decided to allow Parliament to vote on military action. Examples of this include:

Iraq (2003) – Tony Blair held a vote in Parliament on the deployment of military troops for the invasion of Iraq. It passed by 412-149.



A damaged housing block in Iran (Tasnim News)

Syria (2013) – David Cameron held a vote on whether to respond militarily to President Assad of Syria using chemical weapons against his own people. The military response was denied following a vote of 285-272.

Prime Minister's may do this for a number of reasons, including:

Democratic Legitimacy – Allowing Parliament to vote on military action will likely reinforce the case for military action as it is backed by a democratic mandate.

Political Risk Sharing – Allowing Parliament to vote on military action means that the political risk if it backfires is somewhat shared with the legislature.

Party Management – Allowing a vote in Parliament may enable them to better manage any internal dissent to the action.

However, equally, there have been many occasions when Prime Minister's have not allowed Parliament to directly express its view.

In the past, some political figures have called for a War Powers Act, piece of legislation that would remove the right of the Prime Minister to unilaterally order military action and would instead make it contingent on parliamentary approval. Most famously, Jeremy Corbyn called for this in April 2018 when Theresa May ordered military action against regime of President Assad. On Wednesday 4 March 2026,

Corbyn presented the Military Action (Parliamentary Approval) (No. 2) Bill to the House of Commons, with a second reading scheduled for Friday 17 April. The purpose of the Bill is to:

‘Require parliamentary approval for the deployment of UK armed forces and military equipment for armed conflict; to require parliamentary approval for the granting of permission by Ministers for use of UK military bases and equipment by other nations for armed conflict; to require the withdrawal of that permission in circumstances where parliamentary approval is not granted; to provide for certain exemptions from these requirements; to make provision for retrospective parliamentary approval in certain circumstances; and for connected purposes.’

Yet, a fundamental argument against this would be that it would interfere with the ability of the UK to respond quickly and effectively to emerging threats. In the case of the action over Iran, Starmer would argue that he had to act decisively to ensure the protection of British nationals in the region. Consequently, the ability of the Prime Minister to unilaterally order military action is unlikely to change.



Jeremy Corbyn called for a ‘War Powers Act’ in 2018, and introduced a presentation bill in Parliament last week with a similar intention. It is unlikely, however, that any government would voluntarily give up the prerogative power to act swiftly without parliamentary approval.

US

Is Trump's war in Iran a constitutional crisis in the making?

3.3.3.2 - Limitations on Presidential Power

3.3.4 - The imperial presidency

President Trump launched joint military strikes with Israel against Iran this week, killing Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei and targeting military and government sites across the country. Trump described the operation as "massive and ongoing," and acknowledged that its full scope and duration could not yet be determined. At least six American service members have been killed. Congress was not asked for approval before the strikes began.

The constitutional tension is stark. Article I of the Constitution grants Congress, not the president, the power to declare war. Yet Trump justified the operation under Article II commander-in-chief authority, a rationale that legal experts have widely challenged. Bipartisan war powers resolutions have been introduced in both chambers, led by Republican Representative Thomas Massie and Democratic Senator Tim Kaine, but most Republicans are expected to block them.

The operation illustrates the concept of the imperial presidency at its most direct: a president committing the nation to what even he describes as a war, without a congressional vote, a formal declaration, or a public legal justification. Whether Congress can meaningfully reassert its constitutional war-making role remains deeply uncertain.



Does the Texas Democratic primary reveal a party divided over how to win?

3.2.2.1 - Congress: Representation

3.5.2.2 - Parties: Internal Conflicts and Tendencies

Texas Democrats chose their candidate for the United States Senate in the first primaries of the midterm election cycle. State Representative James Talarico, a 36-year-old former teacher and Presbyterian seminarian, defeated Congresswoman Jasmine Crockett, a civil rights lawyer and prominent progressive voice, in one of the most closely watched Democratic primaries in recent memory. The result is significant for a party that has not won a statewide race in Texas since 1994.

The contest appeared to crystallise a debate at the heart of the Democratic Party. Crockett built a following among voters who wanted Democrats to fight aggressively against the Trump administration, earning strong support from Black voters and progressives energised by her combative public profile. Talarico, by contrast, mixed progressive economic arguments with openly Christian language, pointing to his record of holding a Republican-leaning state legislative district as evidence of genuine crossover appeal. Both candidates shared broadly progressive policy positions, meaning the contest was less about ideology and more about strategy: which approach gives Democrats the best chance of competing in a state they have long struggled to win.

Talarico's campaign explicitly targeted Hispanic voters in South Texas and moderates in suburban areas, reflecting a coalition-building logic that must ultimately extend beyond the party's activist base. His victory was built on the argument that electoral success in hostile territory requires reaching voters who have drifted away from the party, not simply mobilising those already committed to it.

The result raises important questions about partisan polarisation within the Democratic Party. Talarico's win suggests that a significant portion of the Democratic electorate believes long-term electoral success requires prioritising coalition-building over the politics of confrontation.

Does the Texas Republican runoff reveal a party at war with itself?

3.2.2.1 - Congress: Representation

3.5.2.2 - Parties: Internal Conflicts and Tendencies

The Texas Republican Senate primary failed to produce a winner and instead confirmed what many in the party had feared: a bitter runoff between two deeply hostile candidates. Incumbent Senator John Cornyn, a 23-year veteran of the chamber and former Senate Majority Whip, and Attorney General Ken Paxton, a MAGA-aligned firebrand, will face each other again on 26 May. Congressman Wesley Hunt finished a distant third and conceded. Over \$110 million in advertising was spent before a single runoff ballot was cast.

The race has exposed a fault line at the heart of the modern Republican Party. Cornyn represents the institutional wing: a legislator whose record rests on deal-making and Senate leadership. His central vulnerability is a 2022 bipartisan gun-safety bill he championed after the Uvalde school shooting, a compromise that earned him lasting suspicion from a base that increasingly equates negotiation with betrayal. Paxton, by contrast, has built his identity on confrontation: he spoke at the Stop the Steal rally on 6 January 2021, led a lawsuit seeking to overturn Biden's 2020 victory, and was impeached by the Republican-controlled Texas legislature in 2023 on charges including bribery and abuse of office.

Conspicuously absent has been any endorsement from President Trump. Despite all three candidates competing publicly for his backing, Trump declined to choose a side, apparently unwilling to alienate any faction of his coalition. Surveys found over half of Republican primary voters in Texas would be more likely to back a Trump-endorsed candidate, making his silence the defining feature of the contest.

This race illustrates the tensions within the contemporary Republican Party. Paxton's persistent polling lead over a well-funded incumbent reflects how thoroughly the grassroots base has shifted its criteria for what a Republican senator should be, prioritising ideological combat over legislative experience.

Global

What do events in Iran tell us about global politics?

A major crisis erupted in the Middle East on 28 February 2026 when the USA and Israel launched a coordinated military assault on Iran. The opening operation involved more than one hundred aircraft and large numbers of cruise missiles striking Iranian command infrastructure, missile facilities, naval assets and intelligence sites across the country. Iranian state media later confirmed that Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei had been killed in the strikes along with senior figures in the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC). The conflict widened rapidly; Iran launched waves of ballistic missiles and Shahed drones against Israel and against US military installations across the Gulf, including facilities in Bahrain, Qatar, Kuwait and the United Arab Emirates. By early March the war had also spread to maritime operations: a US submarine torpedoed the unarmed Iranian frigate IRIS Dena near Sri Lanka, while dozens of Iranian naval vessels were reported destroyed during the opening phase of the campaign. What began as a strike campaign against Iranian military capacity has escalated into a broader regional war with no clear end in sight.

From the perspective of global politics, the war illustrates the erosion of the traditional Westphalian model of sovereignty. Under contemporary international law, the legitimate use of force is tightly restricted by the United Nations Charter. Article 51 allows states to act in self-defence in response to an armed attack, while other military action requires authorisation by the United Nations Security Council. Neither condition clearly applied to the initial US-Israeli assault. Washington and Tel Aviv justified the campaign primarily through the language of anticipatory self-defence and humanitarian



concern. Donald Trump argued that Iran posed an imminent threat and was approaching nuclear weapons capability, while Benjamin Netanyahu framed the strikes partly as an effort to protect the Iranian population from repression by its own government. However, the threshold for anticipatory self-defence under international law requires an immediate and overwhelming threat and the R2P "Responsibility to Protect" logic seems tenuous given the impact that US-Israeli strikes are having on Iran's citizens. The episode highlights a deeper tension between the formal rules governing sovereignty and the strategic behaviour of powerful states. The notion of a "rules-based international order" becomes difficult to sustain when the leading architects of that order (i.e. the USA) appear willing to bypass its legal constraints.

The conflict also reveals how deeply economic globalisation links regional crises to the wider international economy. The most important example concerns the Strait of Hormuz, the narrow maritime corridor between Iran and Oman through which around one fifth of globally traded oil normally passes. Iran has not formally declared the strait closed, but the threat of missile and drone attacks has produced a de facto shutdown of shipping. War-risk insurance premiums for tankers transiting the Gulf rose from roughly 0.2% of a ship's value to around 1% within days of the outbreak of fighting, and in some cases as high as 3%. As insurers withdrew coverage,

tanker traffic through the strait collapsed from roughly thirty-seven vessels per day to effectively zero. At the same time, Iranian drone strikes forced the temporary suspension of production at Qatar's Ras Laffan LNG (liquefied natural gas) complex, the largest LNG export facility in the world. Qatar normally supplies about 20% of globally traded LNG. Energy markets reacted immediately. Brent crude (a global benchmark for oil prices) rose above \$90 per barrel for the first time since late 2023, while European gas prices surged sharply as traders anticipated supply disruptions. East Asian economies are particularly vulnerable – over 90% of Japan's oil imports, for example, travel through the Strait of Hormuz. Economic globalisation has created unprecedented prosperity, but it has also produced a system in which geopolitical shocks proliferate and spread rapidly across the entire world economy.

Another revealing aspect of the crisis concerns the relationship between state sovereignty and transnational corporations, particularly technology companies involved in artificial intelligence. Modern military operations increasingly rely on advanced data processing platforms capable of analysing large volumes of intelligence information. One such system is Maven Smart Systems, developed by the American firm Palantir to assist military intelligence analysis and targeting processes. Reuters reporting indicates that this platform incorporated prompts and software components built using Claude, the large language model developed by the US AI company Anthropic. A public dispute subsequently emerged between Anthropic and the US government. The company refused to remove safeguards embedded in Claude that prohibit "autonomous lethal decision-making" (i.e. the AI deciding to kill someone, without a human making the final

Global

decision) and large-scale surveillance of American citizens. In response, the Pentagon classified Anthropic as a supply-chain risk and instructed defence contractors to remove its technology from Pentagon-related work. The episode demonstrates that despite the enormous economic influence of technology firms, governments retain decisive authority over companies operating within their jurisdiction when national security concerns are involved.

The crisis also highlights the limited capacity of international institutions to constrain the actions of powerful states. An emergency meeting of the United Nations Security Council was convened on 28 February at the request of Russia and China following the initial strikes. UN Secretary-General António Guterres warned that the escalation risked triggering a wider regional conflict and urged all parties to return to diplomacy. However, the Security Council has not produced binding action capable of restraining either Washington or Tel Aviv. European responses have similarly been limited to diplomatic statements. The European Union called for “maximum restraint” and for full respect for international law while condemning Iranian missile attacks on neighbouring countries. Britain, France and Germany issued similar appeals for de-escalation while reiterating their support for Israel's security. In practice these statements have had little direct impact on the conduct of the war, illustrating the structural limits of supranational institutions in a system dominated by sovereign states.

The war also raises broader questions about the relationship between hard power and soft power in the contemporary international system. Militarily, the campaign demonstrates the extraordinary reach of American and Israeli forces. Long-range strikes deep inside Iran, the elimination of key

figures within the Iranian leadership and naval operations thousands of kilometres from US territory all illustrate a level of military capability that few other states possess. Russia, despite its long-standing relationship with Tehran, has shown no capacity to defend its partner from such operations. China has criticised the escalation but has not intervened militarily. Yet these operations may simultaneously damage US soft power. The legality of the strikes is contested, civilian casualties have generated criticism across parts of the Global South, and there remains no clear political end state to the war. Military success does not automatically translate into international legitimacy. In addition, Iran has successfully used relatively cheap and mass-produced Shahed drones to saturate and overwhelm expensive US-produced THAAD air defences in the Gulf region (which work by shooting down incoming drones and missiles). While US air defence systems have been able to intercept most missiles, the cost of producing a Shahed drone (\$50,000) vs intercepting one (\$13million) is wildly asymmetric; pointing towards a future where having more expensive and advanced technology does not necessarily translate into being able to “win” a war decisively.

Taken together, the crisis illustrates the continuing debate between realist and liberal interpretations of international politics. Liberal theory emphasises the role of international law, institutions and economic interdependence in restraining



conflict. Realist theory instead stresses power, security competition and the primacy of sovereign states operating within an anarchic international system. The events of early 2026 appear to support several realist assumptions. Military force remains a central instrument of state policy, powerful states can act with limited institutional constraint, and international organisations have struggled to enforce collective rules. At the same time, the economic shock generated by disruptions in the Gulf demonstrates that global interdependence still shapes the behaviour of states. Even the most powerful actors cannot fully insulate themselves from the consequences of instability elsewhere in the international system.

Iran: 8 Geopolitical Milestones Since 1945

1953 - Operation Ajax CIA/MI6 overthrow Mosaddegh after oil nationalisation. The Shah reinstated, fuelling anti-Western resentment.

1963 - The White Revolution US-backed modernisation triggers clerical backlash. Khomeini exiled; seeds of 1979 planted.

1979 - Islamic Revolution Shah flees, Khomeini returns. The 444-day hostage crisis destroys US-Iran relations.

1980-88 - Iran-Iraq War US-backed Iraq invades. One million dead, no territorial change. Revolutionary identity hardens.

2002 - Nuclear Programme Exposed Covert enrichment facilities revealed, triggering two decades of sanctions and confrontation.

2015 - The JCPOA Iran limits its nuclear programme for sanctions relief. Trump withdraws in 2018; enrichment resumes to near weapons-grade.

2011-present - Axis of Resistance Iran directs Hezbollah, Iraqi militias, Assad, and the Houthis across the Middle East.

2020 - Soleimani Assassinated US drone strike kills Iran's top military commander. Iraq moves to expel US forces; nuclear programme accelerates.