



## UK Politics

### What do debates over North Sea Oil tell us about divisions within the Labour Party?

#### 1.2.2 – Established political parties 1.2.4 – UK political parties in context

The ongoing conflict in the Middle East has contributed to rising fuel prices globally. In the UK, this has led to renewed debate about further drilling in the North Sea and created a clear divide between political parties.

Whilst Kemi Badenoch has launched a campaign to 'get Britain drilling', a view long supported by Reform, the position of Labour is far less clear. The government has previously said that it intends to continue drilling in existing oil fields, but does not intend to expand any further, instead preferring a managed transition to renewable energy. However, whilst the UK remains dependent on fossil fuels, there have been growing calls from some within the party for the government to grant new drilling licences.

The energy secretary, Ed Miliband, has been the chief opponent of further North Sea drilling, whilst the chancellor, Rachel Reeves, has shown herself to be more open to the idea. The compromise may be to allow drilling in the Jackdaw gas field, whilst continuing to refuse drilling in the Rosebank oilfield.

Outside of cabinet, MPs have also



shown themselves to be divided, with Labour MPs in more urban areas seemingly more reluctant to support further drilling. This may be indicative of where Labour MPs see their greatest challenge come the next election. MPs in constituencies where the Greens will likely be challenging may not want to give their opponents the opportunities to say Labour have betrayed their environmental credentials, whilst Labour MPs fearing a threat on the right may wish to avoid giving the Conservatives or Reform the opportunity to argue Labour are prioritising a 'green agenda' at the expense of cheaper energy (even if this claim is contested).

Labour is also under pressure from its affiliated trade union, the GMB, who have opposed the move away from drilling due to the risk it poses to jobs, particularly in North East Scotland. Additionally, the Scottish Labour leader, Anas Sarwar, is also in favour of further drilling in Scotland (where oil and gas is a major source of jobs and income), further deepening the divide between the Scottish and UK-wide leadership.

Given the polarising decision that faces Labour on the issue, divisions within the upper echelons of the party seem inevitable. The issue also serves to demonstrate the dilemmas that face Labour given the increasingly multi-party nature of UK politics, and the need to fight in a more crowded field with viable opposition on its left and right.

### What do the latest BMA strikes tell us about Labour-trade union relations?

#### 1.3 - Pressure groups

On Tuesday 7 April, the resident (formerly 'junior') doctors began a six-day strike over pay. This was the fifteenth such strike since 2023. Industrial action has been caused by the BMA's contention that resident doctors' pay in the NHS has not kept up in real terms (once inflation is taken into account). It is estimated that pay has fallen by around 20% in real terms since 2008 (around the time of the global financial crisis when public sector workers experienced pay freezes).

In the final years of the Conservative government, a range of trade unions were in disputes with the government over improved pay deals for their members. Many of these were resolved once Labour came to office in July 2024 - unsurprising given their closer ideological alignment - however, the dispute with the BMA has rumbled on.

Given the comparatively high wages doctors earn (compared to average incomes across the UK), public sympathy for the strikes has been somewhat muted, which perhaps helps to explain the government's refusal to concede to the BMA's demands. Labour governments are also wary of being accused of being in lockstep with their 'union paymasters', even if the BMA is not actually affiliated with the party.

The ongoing BMA dispute serves as a good example that not all trade unions are closely affiliated with Labour, and nor does having a similar ideological outlook guarantee a pressure group success when dealing with the government.

# Senedd Election Special

## What are the key issues in Wales?

On Thursday 7 May 2026, all people living in Wales who are over the age of 16 (and who have registered to vote) will be able to vote to elect a new Senedd Cymru (Welsh Parliament). This is an historic election as it will be the first election since the passing of the Senedd Cymru (Members and Elections) Act 2024 which has increased the number of MSs from 60 to 96, as well as changing the voting system to a proportional system.

Wales is an interesting case study as alongside the 'Big Three' we are familiar with in Westminster, smaller parties also have had significant electoral success and are looking to gain seats thanks to the new proportional system. Studying the various manifestos allows us to see what commonalities there are across all parties but also how devolved nations' priorities may vary from those in general elections.

### Labour: 'A New Chapter for Wales'

Labour has historically been the largest and most successful party in Wales but its dominance has been shaken by large gains made by smaller parties such as Plaid Cymru as well as dissatisfaction from Welsh voters due to core institutions such as the Welsh NHS and schools in Wales underperforming compared to their English counterparts in several measures. Welsh Labour states that its manifesto offers a 'bold and hopeful plan for a new chapter in Wales,' after 'years of challenges,' such as the Covid-19 pandemic and cost-of-living crisis. They focus on the NHS and lowering living costs as well as emphasising 'fairness,'. These are very similar themes to those of the central Labour party currently governing in Westminster.

### Conservatives: 'Fix Wales: Our Plan to Get Wales Working'

The Welsh Conservatives have not had the history of dominance that their Westminster counterparts have enjoyed throughout the twentieth century but they are hoping that more proportional

voting will increase their seats in the Senedd. Their manifesto strongly focuses on economic improvement, aiming to 'rocket-boost,' the economy through, amongst other policies cutting business rates on small businesses and cutting taxes on families as well as extending free childcare and encouraging investment in Wales. They also focus on improving the NHS, in line with Labour and Plaid Cymru. However, it is interesting to note that the Welsh Conservatives often lay the blame for the underperformance of Wales on the doorstep of both Plaid Cymru and Welsh Labour.

### Liberal Democrats: 'Fair Deal for Wales'

In line with the other parties, the Lib Dems in Wales focus on improving and protecting the NHS through cutting waiting times (a theme common to all manifestos) and improving social care. They also promise to extend free childcare to help tackle the cost of living as well as to support local businesses and the local economy. However, where they differ significantly from the other parties is their focus on the environment through policies such as free public transport for under 25s, ending the dumping of sewage along the expansive Welsh coastline and opposing plans from other parties to encourage fracking in Wales.

### Reform UK: 'Put Wales First'

Reform UK has enjoyed a lot of media headlines and news stories in Wales, particularly around the October 2025 Caerphilly by-election and it is hoping to use this attention to propel its candidates to seats in the Senedd. In line with their Westminster counterpart, Reform UK focuses on limiting immigration and removing the 'Nation of Sanctuary' scheme to help asylum seekers. Similarly to the Conservatives, Reform UK's Welsh manifesto promises to lower business costs and to boost Welsh business. They also promise to cut 1p from each tax band by the end of their term in government. Reform UK are also clearly targeting Plaid Cymru's traditional rural stronghold by aiming to win votes in agricultural areas through promising to 'let farmers farm,'.

Reform UK also promises to focus on the NHS and improve various metrics such as waiting times.

### Plaid Cymru: 'New Leadership for Wales'

Plaid Cymru is a party that, long term, aims for Welsh independence although it has ruled this out as an objective in its first term in office, according to the BBC. Plaid Cymru has gained seats steadily in recent years and has expanded away from its traditional Welsh-speaking heartlands, with a significant win in the October 2025 by-election in Caerphilly. It has outlined a 'First 100 Days' plan if they gain control of the Senedd which focuses on themes such as improving the Welsh NHS, raising educational standards and a more 'just Wales,'. So far, so Welsh Labour. However, Plaid Cymru are more bold in their manifesto, focusing specifically on enhancing Welsh culture, heritage, sport and arts as well as 'Unleashing Wales's economic potential,' and using the 'super-abundance of natural resources,' to drive 'rural resilience.'

### Green Party: 'You Have the Power'

The Green Party is using its manifesto to challenge the Labour predominance in both Westminster and Wales. They focus heavily in the manifesto on reducing the cost of living and taking power from 'billionaires,' and the traditional political parties who have left the Welsh people 'ripped off,'. The manifesto promises to freeze council tax, replacing it with a land tax which they view as more progressive, bring in stricter regulations on landlords and implement universal childcare from nine months old. They also focus, along with the Lib Dems, on water pollution and cleanliness – something that is important in a nation with so much coastline. They are clear that the new electoral system will bring change to Wales and clearly hope to build on their recent successes in English by-elections and their large media presence.

Politics Online's *Senedd Election Special* is written by Anne John. Anne is Politics teacher from Cardiff.

The next edition will examine the likely impact of the new electoral system, as well as some of the smaller parties hoping to benefit from the closed list system.

# UK Government

## Why is Charles III going on a state visit to the US?

### 2.1.1 – The Sources and nature of the UK Constitution

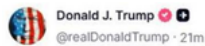
On becoming Prime Minister in July 2024, Keir Starmer was faced with a number of challenges. The starkest of these was the economic situation – particularly as his election campaign had promised economic growth. On arriving at Number 10, he stated that the nation's finances were in a worse state than expected. On 5th November 2024, a new challenge emerged when Donald Trump was elected to his second term as President. The relationship between the UK and US has long been termed a 'special relationship' and is essential to both Britain's security and economic interests.

Starmer clearly decided early in his premiership that keeping Trump onside was essential. In his first meeting with Trump, in the Oval Office of the White House, Starmer theatrically produced a letter from his pocket inviting Trump on a state visit to the United Kingdom. This took place in September 2025 and was the first time that a US President had been honoured with a second state visit.



Since then, the relationship between Starmer and Trump has undoubtedly deteriorated. Firstly, they publicly disagreed about the decision to hand the Chagos Islands back to Mauritius and only keeping the Diego Garcia military base via a lease agreement. Secondly, Starmer's decision to prevent the US from using British

military bases for offensive military action against Iran led to friction with Trump commenting 'this isn't Winston Churchill we are dealing with'. Last week Trump posted what many people interpreted as a genocidal threat against Iran on social media. The relationship has undoubtedly become frosty.



A whole civilization will die tonight, never to be brought back again. I don't want that to happen, but it probably will. However, now that we have Complete and Total Regime Change, where different, smarter, and less radicalized minds prevail, maybe something revolutionarily wonderful can happen, WHO KNOWS? We will find out tonight, one of the most important moments in the long and complex history of the World. 47 years of extortion, corruption, and death, will finally end. God Bless the Great People of Iran!

Yet, despite all of this, Charles III is due to attend a state visit to the United States at the end of April. This will include a State banquet at the White House.

No other British Monarch has waited as long to accede to the throne as Charles III. As Prince of Wales, his views on social and political issues were unusually well known. As Prince of Wales, he became an advocate for a number of issues. In particular, he was renowned for speaking about environmental conservation and climate change long before it became fashionable to do so. There can be no doubt that President Trump is far from the company that Charles would usually keep. However, as King, this is what he is constitutionally expected to do.

Britain has a constitutional monarchy in which the monarch 'reigns but does not rule'. Fundamental to their constitutional role is that the monarch follows the advice of their Prime



Minister. Famously, Boris Johnson's advice to prorogue Parliament in August 2019 was found to be ultra vires. Therefore, realistically, the King will often find himself being deployed to suit a current political agenda.

The Monarchy is a soft power asset to the UK, particularly with Trump, who is a known anglophile and who loves the spectacle of state occasions with the Monarch. At present, with the relationship with Trump being strained and unpredictable, preventing the King from attending the pre-arranged state visit would further strain the relationship with Trump.

Other leaders have urged the government not to send Charles on the state visit. These have included Liberal Democrat leader, Ed Davey, who has said it should be called off due to Trump conducting an illegal war in Iran. Notably, Davey boycotted the state banquet for Donald Trump when he visited the UK last year. Many in the UK share the view of Davey. A recent YouGov poll indicated that 46% of Britons believe the visit should not go ahead, whilst 36% believe it should. Yet, the Prime Minister will not want to risk the negative repercussions of offending Trump. The short-term domestic political discomfort of allowing the visit will be seen to be a price worth paying.

# US

## Can a President rewrite the Constitution by Executive Order?

### 3.4.1 - The Nature and Role of the Supreme Court

On 1 April 2026, the Supreme Court heard arguments in *Trump v. Barbara*, one of the most important constitutional cases in years. At issue is President Trump's executive order, signed on his first day back in office, which would end automatic birthright citizenship for children born in the United States to undocumented parents or those on temporary visas. Every federal court that had previously considered a challenge to the order had blocked it, and the administration's repeated appeals eventually forced the Supreme Court to take up the question directly, accepting the case in December 2025.

The route from executive order to Supreme Court is worth understanding, because it shows how major constitutional disputes actually work. Within hours of Trump signing the order, civil rights organisations filed legal challenges in federal district courts. The ACLU, alongside several partner organisations, brought a class action on behalf of children who would be denied citizenship, with the lead plaintiff known only as Barbara, a Honduran citizen who concealed her identity out of fear for her safety. Sixty amicus curiae briefs were filed in total, meaning outside parties submitted written arguments to help inform the court's thinking. Historians, legal scholars, and civil rights groups lined up against the order; Republican state attorneys general and conservative organisations filed in support.

Inside the courtroom, the justices were deeply sceptical of the government's case. Chief Justice John Roberts dismissed the argument that changed

circumstances justified a new reading of the amendment, pointing out simply that it was the same Constitution. Justice Neil Gorsuch, himself a Trump appointee, pressed the government's lawyer on whether the administration's legal theory would even have made sense in the nineteenth century. Justice Ketanji Brown Jackson questioned whether implementing the order was practically workable at all.

We do not yet know how the court will rule, with a decision expected by July 2026. What this case illustrates, however, is the Supreme Court doing exactly what it exists to do: acting as the final check on whether government action is constitutional. The early signs are not encouraging for the administration. The court's hostile questioning follows its recent decision to strike down Trump's sweeping emergency tariffs in the *Learning Resources* case, suggesting a court increasingly willing to push back against executive overreach.

## Does the President control the Justice Department?

### 3.3.1 - Formal Sources of Presidential Power

### 3.3.4 - Interpretations and Debates

On 2 April 2026, President Trump announced that Pam Bondi was leaving her post as Attorney General, praising her as a loyal friend while offering no explanation for her removal. Sources confirmed she had been fired, making her the second Cabinet member forced out in as many months, following the removal of Kristi Noem as Secretary of Homeland Security weeks earlier. The warmth of Trump's send-off could not disguise the reality: an Attorney General dismissed largely because she had not been aggressive enough in prosecuting the president's political enemies.

Two failures defined Bondi's downfall. The first was her inability to secure convictions against Trump's rivals. Charges brought against former FBI Director James Comey and New York Attorney General Letitia James both collapsed when a judge ruled the prosecutor personally appointed by Trump lacked the legal authority to bring the cases. The second, and arguably more damaging, was her handling of the Jeffrey Epstein files. Bondi had initially promised transparency, telling a television audience that a client list was sitting on her desk, a



claim the department later retracted entirely as no such document existed. When files were eventually released following a bipartisan law requiring disclosure, the department managed to both over-redact and under-redact simultaneously: names of Epstein's correspondents were withheld from emails that appeared to reference the abuse of minors, while personal details and identifiable information about some victims were exposed. Republican congressman Thomas Massie publicly accused the department of breaking the law by missing disclosure deadlines, and the House Oversight Committee subpoenaed Bondi to testify before she was even out of the door.

The wider institutional damage is considerable. Career prosecutors were fired, the elite public corruption unit was gutted, and the Civil Rights Division lost large numbers of staff who said it had been turned into an enforcement arm of the White House. Critics argued that what Bondi destroyed in a year could take decades to rebuild, and that her successor, Trump's own former personal defence attorney Todd Blanche, offers little hope of a return to independence.

The Bondi episode is a clear example of what political scientists mean when they discuss the imperial presidency. The Attorney General is supposed to be the nation's chief law enforcement officer, applying the law independently of political direction. What the Bondi tenure showed is that this independence is a norm rather than a guarantee: it depends entirely on the willingness of the president to respect it. When that willingness disappears, there is little in the Constitution to stop it.



## Global

### What does the Iran “ceasefire” tell us about global politics?

#### 3.1 - The state and globalisation

#### 3.4 - Power and developments

#### 3.6 - Comparative theories

As the deadline for promised escalation approached in April 2026, President Trump retreated from earlier maximalist rhetoric and accepted a ceasefire with Iran (however, it is unclear whether the ceasefire extends to cover Israel and the front of the war in Lebanon). This followed public threats to “end Iranian civilisation,” language that signals a marked erosion of the norms-based discourse of rights in international politics. Such statements can be interpreted as, at minimum, an admission of intent to commit war crimes through indiscriminate force, and at worst as genocidal in implication. The subsequent agreement therefore reflects not a position of dominance, but a recalibration under domestic and international constraints.

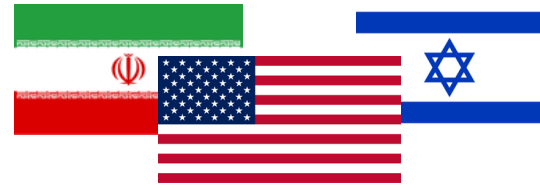
The ceasefire has immediately reduced direct confrontation between the USA and Iran, yet it leaves core strategic questions unresolved. Iranian policymakers have little incentive to accept a permanent settlement without substantial concessions, particularly the withdrawal of US military assets from the Gulf. The USA maintains a dense network of bases across Bahrain, Qatar, Kuwait and the United Arab Emirates, alongside carrier strike groups operating in adjacent waters. These deployments underpin US power projection but also constitute high-value targets. Iran's missile arsenal, including medium-range ballistic systems, anti-ship missiles and drone swarms, provides credible means to threaten these installations. Under such conditions, a durable ceasefire would require structural changes to the regional military balance that Washington is unlikely to accept.

Lebanon remains the most immediate arena of instability for the ceasefire. Israeli operations against Hezbollah have continued at high intensity, raising serious concerns regarding compliance

with international humanitarian law. On 9 April alone, Israeli airstrikes reportedly targeted multiple sites across southern Lebanon and the Bekaa Valley, including urban districts and transport corridors, killing hundreds of civilians in Beirut in a wave of extensive bombings on 8 April alone. Since early April, total fatalities have exceeded 500, with extensive damage to roads, power infrastructure and residential areas. The scale and pattern of strikes, particularly in densely populated zones, have prompted allegations of disproportionate use of force and potential violations of human rights norms in the manner of a “rogue state”. Hezbollah has responded with sustained, though lower-intensity, rocket fire into northern Israel, numbering in the hundreds of projectiles. These exchanges illustrate the limits of state-centric agreements. Hezbollah operates as a non-state actor embedded within Iran's regional strategy and is not directly bound by the ceasefire, while Israeli actions both degrade Hezbollah's capabilities and perpetuate the cycle of retaliation.

Iran's leverage is further amplified through the Strait of Hormuz. Approximately 17 to 20 million barrels of oil per day historically transited the strait, representing around 20 percent of global supply. Since the escalation, flows have at times fallen below 6 million barrels per day. War risk insurance premiums have increased by more than 300 percent, and some shipping has been diverted around the Cape of Good Hope, extending transit times by up to two weeks. Oil prices have fluctuated between 95 and 105 US dollars per barrel. These disruptions highlight the dynamics of economic globalisation, in which regional instability produces immediate global economic consequences. Iran does not need to close the strait entirely; the credible threat of disruption is sufficient to generate systemic effects. By selectively maintaining exports to aligned or neutral partners while constraining flows to adversaries, Iran has been able to sustain revenue while imposing significant costs on its opponents.

The situation exposes clear limits to US



hard power. Despite extensive strikes on Iranian military and nuclear-linked infrastructure, the USA has failed to achieve key objectives. Regime change has not occurred, and external pressure has instead reinforced internal cohesion within Iran. Efforts to halt Iran's nuclear programme have also proven ineffective. Proposed operations against hardened facilities, including those near Isfahan, were constrained by advanced Iranian air defence systems, with reports of US aircraft losses and aborted missions highlighting operational limits deep within enemy territory. Similarly, the USA has been unable to fully reopen the Strait of Hormuz. Iranian use of fast attack craft, drones and missile saturation, and the threat of mining the waters, continues to deter normal shipping volumes, demonstrating the vulnerability of even superior naval forces in confined and contested environments.

These outcomes indicate a broader shift in global power. The USA retains unmatched aggregate capabilities but faces increasing constraints in their application. In contrast, China has emerged as a relative beneficiary. Beijing has avoided direct involvement while continuing to secure energy supplies, often at discounted rates, and presenting itself diplomatically as a more responsible and neutral actor seeking to resolve the conflict. This enhances China's position within global markets and strengthens its influence among states seeking alternatives to US-led security frameworks.

From a theoretical perspective, the ceasefire aligns with realist expectations. States prioritise security, mistrust persists, and agreements remain temporary in the absence of resolved power competition. Liberal interpretations emphasise diplomacy and interdependence, yet weak enforcement mechanisms and ongoing violations limit their explanatory power.