



Is the link between Labour and trade unions eroding?

1.1.3 - Pressure Groups

1.2.2 - Established parties

1.4 - Voting patterns and behaviour

Last week The Times newspaper reported that a new poll indicated that members of the largest trade unions – Unite and GMB – were now as likely to back Reform as they were Labour.

The importance of the trade union movement to the Labour Party cannot be overstated. Labour was founded by the concerted efforts of the trade union movement at the turn of the twentieth century and has remained the party's financial lifeline ever since. However, as the number of union members backing Labour declines, this may lead to growing pressure within unions to disaffiliate from the party, and with it cease their funding.

The poll also raises questions about who Labour's voters are if they are not trade unionists. This will add to the stereotype that Labour has become the party of the urban intelligentsia (sometimes disparagingly described as 'lefty Islington lawyers') rather than being the party of the working class which it claims to be (a point that Boris Johnson was keen to make after the 2019 General Election, and Nigel Farage is making today).

Labour are repeatedly at pains to highlight areas of Reform policy which they argue would put the working class at a disadvantage, which they liken to Thatcherism (and seek to play up Nigel Farage's membership of the Conservatives under her leadership). Similar sentiments have also been echoed by some trade union leaders when asked to comment on the poll's findings. However, polling repeatedly puts Reform out ahead, as they have

been in virtually every poll for over a year. In the most recent YouGov poll published last week, the party were on 27%, 9pp ahead of both Labour and the Conservatives on 18%.

The longer-term relationship between Labour the unions – especially Unite – will likely not be settled until after any anticipated leadership struggle. However, the poll of trade union voting patterns will trouble some within Labour, as they continue to portray themselves as the party of ordinary working people.

Could Restore Britain help elect Andy Burnham in Makerfield?

1.2.3 - Minor and emerging parties

1.3 - Electoral systems

A significant amount of political attention is currently on the Makerfield by-election, due to be held on Thursday 18 June, with Andy Burnham seeking a return to the House of Commons and, potentially, making a bid for the Labour leadership. A poll by Survation in recent weeks put Burnham narrowly ahead of the Reform candidate, Robert Kenyon (43% to 40%).

However, the most noticeable number in the polling was the relatively strong performance of Restore Britain party on 7%, which would be enough to deprive Reform UK of a plurality.

Restore Britain was set up formally as a political party earlier this year. Its leader, Rupert Lowe, is the MP for Great Yarmouth and the party's only representative in the House of Commons.

Lowe was originally elected as a Reform MP at the 2024 General Election but was suspended from the party over allegations of bullying, although Lowe denied this and said it was a hoax in response to his criticisms of the party leader, Nigel Farage.



Whatever the reason or Lowe's departure from Reform, he has since established his new party, which has been described as being to the right of Reform, and has received the endorsement of various far-right figures, as well as the endorsement of Elon Musk, who has used his X (formerly Twitter) platform to boost Lowe's posts.

Restore Britain's policies include net-negative immigration (more people leaving the UK than arriving), and the reintroduction of the death penalty. With virtually no chance of winning a general election any time soon, it has not felt the need to water down any of its policies in the way Reform UK might be said to, given its increasingly realistic prospects of having to implement them.

Whilst Restore Britain's performance in nationwide polling has been more muted (3% in the most recent YouGov poll), their presence is an interesting example of the growing support for right-wing parties. It may also come to serve as an example of the limitations of first-past-the-post, should support for the party deprive another party of a similar disposition the seat in favour of a candidate at the other end of the political spectrum.



UK Government

How damaging is the final tranche of Mandelson messages to the UK Government?

2.2.4 – The ways in which Parliament interacts with the Executive

This week the government finished publishing the bulk of the files relating to the appointment of Peter Mandelson as UK Ambassador to the United States. These files were not limited to formal documents; they also included private messages between Mandelson and government ministers, some of them acutely embarrassing. Presenting the disclosure to the House of Commons, Darren Jones - the newly created Chief Secretary to the Prime Minister - called it one of the largest government publications ever laid before the House, an exercise that cost the Cabinet Office alone more than £1 million. Even Jones did not emerge unscathed.

The first problem was not what the files contained, but what they didn't. It quickly became clear that thousands of messages which should have formed part of the disclosure could not be released, because ministers - including Jones himself and Keir Starmer - had used WhatsApp's "disappearing messages" feature, which deletes messages and renders them unrecoverable after a set period. Jones told the Commons he was among those who no longer had access to all his exchanges. This has been a problem in government for some time. Indeed, the very practice of conducting government business over WhatsApp, rather than official channels, is itself troubling.

When Tony Blair came to power in 1997, his government pledged to introduce a Freedom of Information Act. It passed in 2000 and became operational in 2005. The Act gives the public access to information held by public authorities. Exceptions were built into it - for national security, for



example - but the default position is that government information is disclosable. The aim was to make government more transparent and to rebuild public confidence in political institutions.

The difficulty is that the Act has arguably discouraged ministers and officials from communicating openly, precisely because they fear their communications may one day be disclosed. Blair himself later regretted introducing it, writing in his 2010 memoir, *A Journey*:

'You idiot. You naive, foolish, irresponsible nincompoop. There is really no description of stupidity, no matter how vivid, that is adequate. I quake at the imbecility of it.'

The issue of "government by WhatsApp" first reared its head after the COVID-19 pandemic, when the public inquiry struggled to obtain government data. Awkwardly for Labour, they had been fiercely critical of Boris Johnson's government over exactly this issue while in opposition - which makes their current position look distinctly hypocritical.

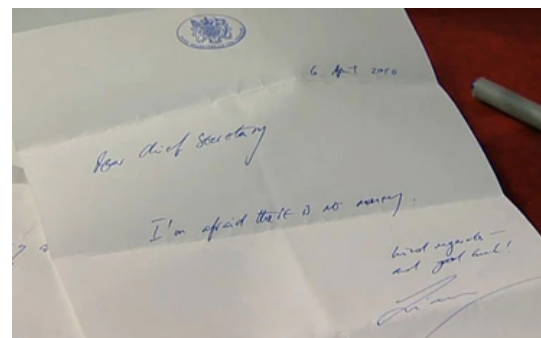
Beyond the missing messages, several of those that were published have proved damaging. The most widely reported came from Pat McFadden - then the senior minister in the Cabinet Office, and now Secretary of State for Work and Pensions following the September 2025 reshuffle. On 24 May 2025, agreeing with Mandelson that the parliamentary party was in a "mutinous state," he wrote: "Every

meeting I have is 'who can we tax in order to pay benefits to others'. They're asking the wrong questions." That the man who now runs the welfare brief once voiced this frustration only sharpens its sting.

Starmer's struggles to manage his own party over welfare cuts run to the heart of his problems as Prime Minister. The most notable was a plan to cut welfare spending by around £5 billion a year by 2030 by tightening the eligibility criteria for Personal Independence Payments. It became one of Starmer's many U-turns when more than 130 Labour MPs indicated they would back an amendment that would, in practice, have killed the bill.

To have such a statement from a sitting minister in the public domain is damaging, and the Opposition will return to it for years. This has happened before. By tradition, an outgoing minister leaves a note for their successor after a change of government - sometimes serious, sometimes playful. In 2010, Liam Byrne, the outgoing Chief Secretary to the Treasury, left a one-line note: "I'm afraid there is no money." It was made public by his successor and brandished by the Conservatives for the next five years to attack Labour's economic record.

The ghost of Peter Mandelson, it seems, continues to haunt the government of Keir Starmer.



The infamous "there is no money" note left by Liam Byrne, outgoing Chief Secretary to the Treasury following the fall of the Labour Government in 2010, became a millstone around the necks of Labour for many years whilst trying to convince voters they could be trusted with the economy.

US

Can Congress still say no to the president?

3.2.2.2 –Legislative function of Congress

3.2.2.3 – Congressional oversight

3.3.3.2 - Limitations on presidential power

3.3.4 - Interpretations and debates

For most of Trump's second term, Congress has done what Trump wanted. The Republicans who control both chambers rarely pushed back. That is starting to shift. On 13 May 2026, House members forced a vote on military aid for Ukraine, using a tool called a discharge petition. A discharge petition lets a majority of the House, 218 members, drag a bill onto the floor even when the Speaker refuses to schedule it. Every Democrat signed, joined by a handful of Republicans. The bill, the Ukraine Support Act, would send roughly 1.3 billion dollars in aid and hit Russia with new sanctions. Trump opposes both. Congress moved anyway, and went around Speaker Mike Johnson to do it.

A stranger test came days later. On 28 May, the Treasury Secretary held up a mockup of a new 250 dollar note. On it: Trump's face and signature, designed for America's 250th birthday on 4 July. There is just one snag. It is against the law. A statute from 1866 says no living person can appear on US currency. So the note cannot be printed unless Congress repeals that law first. The Treasury admitted as much: the decision sits with Capitol Hill, not the White House. A Republican introduced a bill last year to authorise the note. It has gone nowhere. No party leader has put their name to it.

This is the cleanest test of the lot. There is no policy excuse to hide behind, no jobs or tax cut attached. To make it happen, Republicans would have to vote, on the record, to scrap a 160-year-old rule simply to

flatter the president. So far, none of them want to own that vote. The bill is stuck, and House Democratic leaders have called it a flat no. Even a loyal majority, it turns out, will not sign off on everything. The note is not a one-off, either. The Treasury has also floated a commemorative dollar coin with Trump's face on it, part of a wider push to stamp his name across the federal government.

The president's reach abroad has faced the sharpest test of all. In late February, Trump launched his military campaign against Iran without asking Congress. The House first tried to stop it in March and failed by the narrowest of margins, 212 to 219. In May the Senate inched forward, voting 50 to 47 to drag its own version out of committee, with four Republicans breaking ranks. Then, on 3 June, the breakthrough came. The House passed a resolution ordering Trump to wind down the war, 215 to 208, again with four Republicans crossing the aisle. It was the first time either chamber had passed a war powers measure on a final vote since the fighting began, now almost 100 days ago. Speaker Johnson had fought to stop it, sending members home early for the May recess two weeks before when it looked set to pass. The anger only grew over the break, with some Republicans now hearing from constituents about the war's rising costs.

There was a third retreat as well. The White House had planned a 1.8 billion dollar fund to pay pardoned January 6 rioters. It dropped the idea once a federal judge blocked the scheme and members of both parties rounded on it.

Each of these tests a different power Congress holds. The discharge petition lets the House overrule its own leadership and force a vote the Speaker wants buried. The war powers votes rest on a simple constitutional point: Article I gives Congress, not the president, the power to take the



country to war, and the War Powers Resolution of 1973 was written to enforce it. The currency bill works because Congress writes the law, and the president cannot move without it. The collapse of the rioters' fund comes back to the oldest lever of all, the power of the purse: Congress decides how public money is spent.

None of this is a rebellion, and none of it forces Trump's hand on its own. The Iran resolution still needs the Senate, and Trump argues the 1973 law cannot bind him in any case. A forced vote is still just a vote, not a law. He can veto, the Senate leadership is on his side, and the Supreme Court has usually backed his claims to power. But the direction of travel matters. For sixteen months Congress mostly waved things through. Now Republicans in both chambers have broken with Trump over Iran, the House has gone round its own Speaker, and neither party will reward the people who stormed the Capitol. That is a chamber waking up, even if slowly.

All of this speaks to one of the big questions in US politics: the limits of presidential power. The idea of an imperial presidency says modern presidents have grown so powerful that Congress can no longer hold them in check. These past few weeks complicate that. Accountability here rarely looks dramatic. It is not one grand showdown. It is friction, procedure, and the quiet act of refusing to say yes. A banknote that cannot be printed, a war the House has now voted against, and a fund that had to be scrapped are small things on their own. Together, they show that Congress can still say no, even if its no is quieter than it used to be.

Global

How do regional organisations affect transnational corporations?

3.1 - The state and globalisation

3.5 - Regionalism and the EU

The European Union (EU) is often presented as the most developed example of regionalism in the world. By pooling sovereignty through shared institutions, the EU has created a political and economic bloc of around 450 million people. One consequence of this integration is the ability of EU institutions to regulate powerful multinational corporations that operate across national borders.

A clear example emerged recently when the European Commission imposed a €200 million fine on Temu, the Chinese-owned online retail platform. The Commission concluded that Temu had failed to properly assess and manage risks associated with products sold through its marketplace. An investigation found that many products purchased through the platform, including baby toys and electrical chargers, failed EU safety standards. Some toys contained excessive levels of chemicals, while others presented choking hazards.

The significance of the case extends beyond consumer safety. Temu is not a European company, yet it became subject to EU regulation because it operates within the European market. Under the Digital Services Act, the EU can require large online platforms to identify and address systemic risks, demonstrating how regional institutions can exercise authority over non-state actors whose activities cross national borders. The case also highlights an important feature of contemporary global politics.

Economic globalisation has increased the influence of multinational corporations, but it has also encouraged the development of new forms of politically globalised governance above the state level. Rather than individual governments acting alone, EU member



states have collectively created institutions capable of enforcing rules on major corporations. The Temu fine illustrates how regional organisations can act as significant political actors in their own right, shaping corporate behaviour and setting standards that influence global markets.

What do Russian drone incursions in Eastern Europe show us about the limits of security regionalism and collective defence?

3.2 - Global governance: political and economic

3.4 - Power and developments

3.5 - Regionalism and the EU

Recent drone incursions into NATO territory provide a valuable test of how regional organisations respond to security crises that fall below the threshold of conventional war. Rather than confronting a large-scale military attack from Russia, NATO and the EU have increasingly faced ambiguous “grey zone” threats that challenge traditional deterrence. Since Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022, more than 70 violations of non-combatant European airspace have been recorded across Romania, Poland, the Baltic states and other neighbouring countries. These incidents have involved Russian drones, missiles and aircraft, alongside Ukrainian drones diverted by Russian electronic warfare.

Romania has become the clearest example of NATO's Article 5 dilemma. Romanian authorities report that drone fragments have been found on Romanian territory on at least 47 occasions since 2022. The most serious incident occurred in late May 2026, when a Russian Geran-2 drone struck an apartment block in Galati, injuring two civilians and forcing the evacuation of around 70 residents. NATO aircraft were

were scrambled and alliance leaders condemned the incident, yet Article 5 was not invoked. Despite direct harm to civilians on NATO territory, the alliance judged the event insufficient to constitute an armed attack requiring collective military action.

The Baltic states have been similarly impacted by the war. In May 2026, a Ukrainian drone, apparently diverted by Russian jamming, entered Estonian airspace and was shot down by NATO aircraft. This marked the first wartime drone interception over Estonia, but collective defence mechanisms were not activated. The political consequences have been significant in Latvia. In 2026, Prime Minister Evika Silina's coalition collapsed following criticism of the government's handling of repeated drone incursions. Defence Minister Andris Spruds resigned amid accusations that anti-drone measures had been deployed too slowly. The crisis demonstrated how hybrid threats can destabilise governments even when they cause limited physical damage.

These cases suggest NATO and the EU have been effective at managing escalation, but less effective at deterring repeated grey-zone provocations. The ambiguity surrounding Article 5 allows security and political disruption to occur without triggering collective defence, exposing a significant limitation in contemporary security regionalism.

