



How will the next Mayor of Manchester be chosen?

1.3 – Electoral systems

The election of Andy Burnham as the MP for Macclesfield has created a vacancy for the position of Mayor of Greater Manchester. A by-election for the position has been scheduled for 30 July, although the mandate will only last until May 2028 (when Burnham's own term was set to expire).

On 17 June, the Government made The Combined Authorities (Mayoral Elections) (Amendment) Order 2026, which brings into force the Government's promise to reinstate the Supplementary Vote (SV) system for mayoral elections, as initially envisaged by the English Devolution and Community Empowerment Act 2026.

SV had been used for mayoral elections – and for the election of Police and Crime Commissioners – since the position of Mayor of London was created in 2000. However, the Elections Act 2022, passed by the previous Conservative government, replaced SV with the more traditional First-Past-The-Post (FPTP) system. The change was widely perceived to give the Conservatives the upper hand due to vote splitting on the left of British politics, thereby giving the Tories an advantage as only a plurality of votes were required, rather than an outright majority.

SV is a majoritarian voting system, requiring a candidate to obtain an overall majority (eg 50% + 1 of the vote) in order to win. This ensures that the winning candidate has more widespread support and can claim to have greater legitimacy for their actions once in office.

In SV elections, candidates are listed by name on a single ballot paper with two columns – one for first preference votes and one for second preference votes. Voters are required to vote twice on one ballot paper – once for their first-choice candidate with an 'X' in the first column, and once for their second-choice candidate with an 'X' in the second column.

Once polling closes, the total first preference votes for each candidate are counted. If any candidate has received a majority of the votes (e.g. more than half the total number of votes), they are deemed to be elected. If no single candidate has a majority, the two candidates with the most votes go through to the second round and all other candidates are eliminated.

The votes for the eliminated candidates are recounted. Any second preference votes for the two candidates still in the race are added to their total, and any second preferences for a candidate who has been eliminated are ignored. Once this process is complete, one of the two remaining candidates will have a majority of the vote and will be deemed the winner.

When this system was last used in the London mayoral contest in 2021, Sadiq Khan was ahead on first preferences after the first round of voting with exactly 40% of the vote. Under FPTP, his plurality would have been enough to see him elected. However, under SV, a second round of counting was required, after which he was deemed elected with 55.2% of the vote. Andy Burnham won an outright majority in both the 2017 and 2021 elections fought under SV, which meant no second round of voting was required.

SV has a number of advantages. As well as conferring more legitimacy on the winner, it allows voters to give their

support to their preferred candidate, even if they have little realistic chance of winning. Providing a voter's second-choice candidate is one of the final two in the contest, their vote will not be wasted. In a crowded field – as we are increasingly seeing in the UK with the rise of Reform UK and the Greens – it prevents a candidate without widespread support from winning by virtue of simply having a small plurality. This also helps to ensure that extremist parties are less likely to win.

However, SV also has a number of disadvantages – it is still very difficult for smaller parties to succeed, as the winning candidate ultimately needs to be in the 'top two' after the first round of voting. Smaller parties ideally need a proportional voting system, such as STV or Closed List PR, in order to be able to gain representation. However, this does not work when only one person is being elected. SV also limits voters to supporting two candidates. Therefore, the Additional Vote (AV) may be deemed preferable, as voters can rank all the candidates in order of preference.

Without Andy Burnham on the ballot paper, it is possible that it will take two rounds of voting in Manchester next month. It will be interesting also to see how parties appeal for first and second preferences from voters who would not normally support their party.

This is the final edition of the *Politics Online Newsletter* for the academic year.

The first edition of the new academic year will be published on Monday 7 September.

Starmmer Resignation Special

What did Keir Starmer achieve as Leader of the Labour Party?

1.2.2 – Established parties

When Keir Starmer steps down as Prime Minister and Leader of the Labour Party, he will bring to an end his six-year tenure as party leader. The significance of this period, particularly the years 2020-2024 cannot be overstated, and was crucial for changing the ideological position and trajectory of the party.

Starmer became the Leader of the Labour Party on 4 April 2020, in the early days of the COVID-19 pandemic. The leadership had become vacant following the resignation of Jeremy Corbyn in the aftermath of the 2019 UK General Election, where the party lost 60 seats, enabling the Conservatives to secure an overall majority.

Corbyn's leadership of the party had been highly divisive. Whilst the party had made gains at the snap 2017 election, the party was bitterly divided, with the Parliamentary Labour Party (PLP) largely against Corbyn as leader. The party had been riven by accusations of antisemitism, and Corbyn's indecisiveness was seen by many to be the cause of many of Labour's problems, especially with regard to the party's stance on Brexit.

Starmer, who had only been elected as an MP in 2015, was widely considered to be the favourite to win the subsequent leadership contest, and was elected on the first count with 56.2% of the vote, defeating Lisa Nandy (14.6%) and the left's preferred candidate, Rebecca Long-Bailey (29.3%).

Under Corbyn, the party had shifted significantly to the left, with his faction having influence over the National Executive Committee (NEC), and close allies in key positions within the party. However, once Starmer took control, the party began shifting towards the centre ground, particularly with a more conservative tone on issues such as illegal immigration and small-boat crossings. This would cause Starmer some difficulties with the party's main donors in the trade union movement.

Perhaps the most significant area of Starmer's leadership came on the issue of



antisemitism. A report by the Equality and Human Rights Commission highlighted the scale of the problem during the Corbyn years, stating:

"This report thoroughly disproves any suggestion that antisemitism is not a problem in the party, or that it is all a smear or a witch-hunt. The report's findings prove the scale of the problem and could help end the denialism amongst parts of the party membership which has further hurt Jewish members and the Jewish community."

Whilst Starmer was issuing full-throated apologies to Labour's Jewish members, Jeremy Corbyn disputed some of the findings of the report. He was subsequently suspended from the party that he had been the leader of less than a year earlier. He would never regain the Labour whip. This was seen by many as Starmer's way of demonstrating that Labour had turned a corner on the issue of antisemitism.

Having initially promised Labour's cooperation during the pandemic, he became increasingly critical of the Government's handling of things. However, repeated changes to Labour's position on lockdowns led to him being referred to as a 'flip flop' by Boris Johnson. However, it would be Johnson's dishonesty – often extracted at the dispatch box in response to questions from Starmer – that would change the course of British politics. Revelations over Partygate saw Johnson's credibility decline, and with it a rise in the opinion polls for Labour. In December 2021, Labour overtook the Conservatives in the polls, which is how it would remain until after the 2024 General Election.

Three Conservative prime ministers in less than two months contributed to the perception that the party could no longer be trusted to govern, and with an election due within two years, it felt as if Starmer and his team could start to prepare for government. The near certainty of victory

in 2024 contributed to the 'Ming vase strategy', where Labour sought not to rock the boat and say or do anything controversial.

As the election drew closer, support for Labour did begin to drop off slightly. This was due in part to a rise in support for Reform, but also from disquiet on the left of the party unhappy with Starmer's unequivocal support for Israel following the 7 October attacks in 2023. This led to the party losing voters – and members – to the Greens and to pro-Gaza independents.

The feeling that a Labour victory was inevitable meant that more attention was being paid to Labour's frontbench, with offers of tickets and other gifts in attempts to gain favour. Attempts to improve the image of Starmer would also be reported upon, with items such as new glasses and clothes being purchased on his behalf by party donor Lord Alli. This would prove to be of great embarrassment to the party once the Register of Members' Interests was published, giving birth to the term 'freebiegate'.

Despite the difficulties, Starmer's place in Labour's history is secured. The party's 174-seat majority is second only to Tony Blair's achievements. The last time Labour was in a comparable position to the one Starmer inherited was in the aftermath of the 1983 election defeat. It would take 14 years and three leaders to make the party electable again. Starmer achieved something similar – albeit with the help of a wayward Conservative Party – in just four years.

Whilst Starmer would go on to show he had a number of weaknesses and limitations as a prime minister, as a party leader he deserves a lot of credit for ensuring that Labour was able to function as an effective opposition during the period 2020-24, and present itself to the electorate as a credible alternative government. If the next leader of the Labour Party is able to improve their standing with the electorate, it will be because they have started on much firmer foundations than the party had the morning after the December 2019 election.

Starmmer Resignation Special

How will Labour choose its new leader?

1.2.2 – Established parties

Whilst much of the coverage in recent days has been on who the next prime minister will be, they will only hold that position by virtue of being leader of the Labour Party. It is therefore an internal party matter first and foremost (albeit one which will have national consequences).

On Thursday 25 June, Labour's ruling National Executive Committee (NEC) published the timetable for choosing its new leader. All members of the Parliamentary Labour Party (PLP) are eligible to put themselves forward for the role. This excludes those who were elected as Labour MPs but who have had the whip removed. Any MP looking to be nominated requires the backing of 20% of the PLP. At present, this amounts to 81 MPs.

In addition to requiring 81 nominations, prospective candidates also require the backing of three bodies affiliated to Labour, two of which must be trade unions. The deadline for nominations is Thursday 16 July.

If only one candidate is nominated for the position, they will be declared the winner on Friday 17 July and could feasibly be appointed Prime Minister by the King that day. If, however, more than one candidate is successfully nominated, the party membership will then be required to vote on who it wants to be the party leader over the summer, with the deadline for ballots being 27 August.

If there are three or more candidates in the leadership contest, members will vote using the Alternative Vote (AV), requiring them to rank candidates in order of preference. If a candidate receives more than half the vote (as Starmer did in 2020), they will be declared the winner. If not, the



candidate with the lowest share of the vote will be eliminated and their votes redistributed. This process continues until someone has a majority.

The above situation is very unlikely, however, as nobody other than Andy Burnham has publicly declared their desire to run. The 20% threshold is a high one, and it would be very difficult for any candidate to achieve without attracting attention from the media. Last week there were rumours that Darren Jones, Chief Secretary to the Prime Minister and a close ally of Starmer, would run. However, he later declared publicly that he would not seek the nomination. With West Streeting making a similar declaration, it is difficult to see who would stand any chance of reaching the threshold.

In some ways, it would suit Burnham for there to be a contest for two reasons. Firstly, it would confer more legitimacy on him and avoid the image of a coronation. The appointments of Theresa May and Rishi Sunak during the previous Conservative spell in office attracted these criticisms, and will be used by the opposition to try to undermine them.

Secondly, it would give him more time to flesh out his ideas and policy priorities over the summer and effectively give him the opportunity to test ideas during hustings. Instead, the newly elected MP for Makerfield is likely to go from the Manchester mayoralty to Downing Street in just under one month. A similar situation occurred in 2016, when Andrea Leadsom withdrew from the Conservative leadership contest after

reaching the members' ballot. This meant May became prime minister in July rather than September, giving her only limited time to prepare for Brexit negotiations and meaning that she was on the back foot from the outset of her premiership.

The mechanics of Labour leadership contests are arguably more democratic than those of the Conservatives, where MPs get to whittle candidates down to a final two before handing the decision over to the party members. This allows MPs to try to manipulate the choice presented to party members (as was rumoured to have occurred in 2019, with Boris Johnson allies voting for Jeremy Hunt, believing he would be an easier opponent to defeat than Michael Gove who ended up coming third).

Whilst the Labour system has merits, it also poses a far greater risk that the winning candidate is unpopular within the PLP, as was the case in 2015 with the election of Jeremy Corbyn. Corbyn, who for decades had been a fringe figure on the left of the party, scraped onto the ballot thanks to the support of party grandees who thought it would be good to widen the debate (with little prospect of him winning). However, once he made the ballot, the party membership chose him to replace Ed Miliband over more mainstream figures, including Andy Burnham.



Andy Burnham contested the 2015 leadership contest but was defeated by Jeremy Corbyn. Corbyn had only just made it onto the ballot after being lent support by MPs who were backing other candidates, including party grandee, Margaret Beckett.

Starmmer Resignation Special

How will Andy Burnham organise his Cabinet?

2.3.3 - The Prime Minister and the Cabinet

Now it is clear that Andy Burnham will be the next Prime Minister, speculation immediately moves to who he will appoint to be in his Cabinet. Unlike other systems, like that of the United States, the Cabinet is chosen by the Prime Minister alone. Members of the Cabinet do not need to be ratified by Parliament and are instead appointed under the royal prerogative powers.

Choosing a Cabinet is one of the most important jobs a Prime Minister has. There are a number of factors a Prime Minister has to consider when choosing a Cabinet:

They will need political allies in key positions

All Prime Ministers feel the need to place political allies in key positions. This guarantees them a supporting voice during difficult Cabinet discussions and gives them people within the Cabinet that they can implicitly trust.

For Burnham, this means he is likely to bring Louise Haigh back into Cabinet after she resigned under the Ministerial Code following admitting she had been convicted relating to a false claim that her phone had been stolen. In addition, it is likely that Heidi Alexander, the current Transport Secretary, will be given a key role. Notably, Alexander was reported to be the first Cabinet Minister to tell Starmer he should resign following Andy Burnham's victory in Makerfield.

They need to represent wings of their party they are less in touch with

Whilst it may be tempting for Prime Ministers to pack their Cabinet with figures who share their political philosophy, it is important for Prime Ministers to show their party that their Cabinet reflects the make-up of the



wider party.

Burnham is identified as being on the soft left of the party. He will, therefore, need to reach across to the Blairite centrist wing of the party. It is likely that Wes Streeting will be given a prominent role to signal to centrists that they will be well represented at the top of government.

They need to reflect the political realities of the time

Sometimes the wider political circumstances of the time place a significant burden on the Prime Minister in the selection of their Cabinet. There may be divisive issues that need to be carefully managed.

For Burnham, it will be the appointment of the Chancellor that will be under the most scrutiny. With huge pressure on the UK economy, Burnham cannot simply appoint an ally to the Treasury — he needs someone who is going to be credible to the bond markets. Speculation that Ed Miliband may be appointed Chancellor has already caused unease with some.

Some Cabinet Members may be appointed due to their vast experience

Prime Ministers will also want to ensure there are wise old heads in the Cabinet, particularly when they are inexperienced in governance. Prime Ministers need figures around them who have 'institutional memory' and can help put political situations in their historical context.

For Burnham, Yvette Cooper is likely to retain a senior position. She is seen as a 'wise old head' in the government. In

addition, it is likely that Starmer ally Pat McFadden will be retained due to his years of experience of frontbench politics.

They need to keep political rivals close

As the saying goes, "keep your friends close, and your enemies even closer." Prime Ministers may decide it is better to give their political rivals a key position where they have some control over them. Whilst in Cabinet, Ministers are constrained by collective responsibility and have to publicly support the Prime Minister.

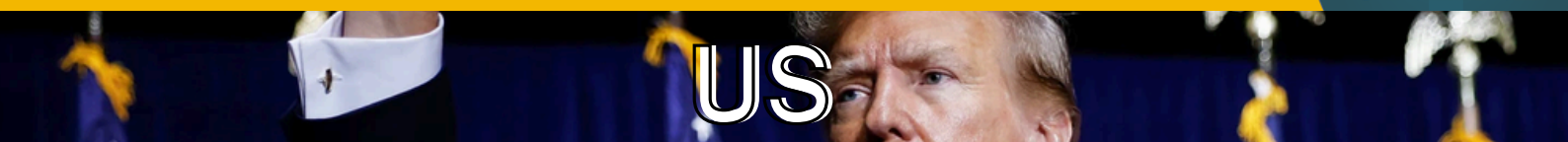
The vast majority of senior government ministers have now publicly endorsed Burnham. Some who were tipped to potentially challenge Burnham, like Darren Jones, have dropped into line. With this decision, he is likely to be maintained in a senior Cabinet role.

Prime Ministers also need to consider the descriptive representation of their Cabinet

Increasingly, Prime Ministers need to consider the descriptive representation of their Cabinets. The public expects that their political leaders reflect the make-up of the nation.

Burnham will likely be looking to install more women in his government, as the party continues to face criticism for never having had a female leader. Angela Rayner, the former Deputy Prime Minister, Lucy Powell, the Deputy Labour Leader, Lisa Nandy, Miatta Fahnbulleh, and Anneliese Midgley are all figures who backed Burnham early and could be offered ministerial roles.





Why is a piece of legislation about housing causing such a stir in Congress?

3.2.2.2 - Legislative Function

In June 2026, Congress passed the 21st Century ROAD to Housing Act, the most significant federal housing legislation in more than three decades. The Senate approved it by 85 votes to 5, and the House followed by 358 to 32, the lower chamber using a fast-track suspension procedure that demanded a two-thirds majority. The bill aims to confront a national affordability crisis by increasing the supply of homes. It streamlines environmental reviews, encourages local governments to ease permitting rules, supports the repair of derelict properties, restricts large institutional investors that already own at least 350 single-family homes from buying more, and bars the Federal Reserve from creating a central bank digital currency before 2030. Having cleared both chambers, the measure now awaits the president's decision.

3.2.2.3 - Oversight

The most striking feature of the Act is the breadth of its support. In a legislature usually defined by party-line votes and gridlock, the bill was steered by Republican and Democratic figures working in tandem, with senators from each party leading the effort and representatives from both sides carrying it through the House. Every Democrat present backed it, and the only opposition came from a small group of Republicans. Cross-party cooperation on this scale is rare, and lawmakers framed it as evidence that Congress can still legislate on the issues voters care about, particularly with midterm elections approaching and the cost of living dominating the national conversation. It is also notable that the package folded in dozens of smaller bipartisan proposals, allowing members from

across the spectrum to claim a stake in the result.

3.3.2 - Informal Sources of Presidential Power

President Trump complicated the bill's path by attaching a condition to it. Hours before a scheduled signing ceremony, he announced that he would withhold his signature until Congress passed the SAVE America Act, a separate measure tightening voter registration and identification requirements that he has described as a national emergency. This is a textbook use of informal presidential power, in this case persuasion and public pressure rather than any formal constitutional tool. By exploiting the visibility of his office and his influence over congressional Republicans, the president sought to link two unrelated bills and convert a popular housing measure into leverage for a separate and far more contested priority of his own. Critics argued the move showed indifference to the affordability crisis, while allies treated it as his prerogative to set the agenda.

3.3.3.2 - Limitations on Presidential Power

The president's leverage, however, is weaker than it first appears. Under the Constitution, once a bill has been presented to the president it becomes law automatically after ten days, Sundays excepted, even without a signature, provided Congress remains in session. Refusing to sign therefore does not stop the Act, it merely delays the ceremony and denies him the credit. The president could issue a formal veto, but the margins by which the bill passed, comfortably beyond the two-thirds required in each chamber, mean that Congress could almost certainly override him. A veto would expend political capital for little reward and would publicly advertise his inability to command his own party on a widely supported measure. Allowing the bill to become law, however reluctantly, is the rational course.

3.1.3 - The Main Characteristics of US Federalism

The Act also illustrates how federal housing policy operates within a federal system. Land use, zoning, and building permits have long been the preserve of state and local government, and the legislation is careful to respect that division. Rather than imposing national mandates, it offers incentives and guidance, directing federal agencies to help states, territories, and localities reform their own permitting and building rules. This is a model of cooperative federalism, in which the national government and the states pursue a shared objective through coordinated action rather than coercion. By nudging local authorities instead of overriding them, the Act works with the reserved powers of the states rather than against them and leaves the detail of reform to the level of government closest to the problem, where local knowledge of housing markets is greatest and where the political accountability for zoning decisions has always rested.

3.1.2 - Key Features of the US Constitution

Taken together, the episode is a clear demonstration of the limits of presidential power. The framers designed the legislative process so that no single actor could dominate it, and the presentment provisions ensure that a determined Congress can enact law even against a reluctant president. Here, a chief executive who controls neither the votes in Congress nor the constitutional clock finds his realistic options narrowed to signing the bill, vetoing it and inviting an override, or quietly stepping aside. The attempt to leverage one bill against another tests the separation of powers, but the outcome suggests that on this occasion the constitutional balance has tilted firmly towards the legislature, where the framers intended the lawmaking power to sit. A president can shape and pressure that process, but he cannot simply will a popular law out of existence.

Global

What have the Ukraine and Iran wars showed us about the changing nature of hard power in modern warfare?

3.4 - Power and developments

Hard power has traditionally been defined as the ability of states to achieve their objectives through military force and coercion. Realists argue that military capabilities remain the foundation of international politics because states operate in an anarchic system where survival depends on military strength. However, recent conflicts suggest that the nature of hard power is changing. While conventional military power remains important, drones, autonomous systems and asymmetric warfare have reduced some of the advantages traditionally enjoyed by great powers.

The war in Ukraine provides the clearest example. Russia entered the conflict with overwhelming advantages in manpower, armour, artillery, air power and nuclear weapons. Yet it failed to achieve its initial objectives of capturing Kyiv, removing the Ukrainian government and forcing Ukraine into submission in a "three-day special operation". Despite facing heavy casualties and initial setbacks, Ukraine has increasingly relied on asymmetric capabilities, particularly drones, to offset Russia's conventional superiority. A key development has been the emergence of cost asymmetry. Ukraine produced around 4 million "robotic and autonomous systems" (i.e. unmanned drones) in 2025 and is projected to produce 5-6 million in 2026, with officials claiming capacity could eventually reach 20 million drones annually if fully funded. Rather than relying on a handful of major defence contractors, Ukraine has developed a decentralised production system that allows rapid innovation and makes manufacturing difficult to disrupt.

The significance lies in the relationship between cost and effect. Ukrainian drones costing thousands of pounds have repeatedly struck Russian infrastructure worth millions. In June 2026, Ukrainian forces targeted a rail bridge near Rozdolne in Crimea, the Kerch thermal power plant oil depot and electrical infrastructure supporting Russian operations. Rather than destroying Russian armies directly, Ukraine increasingly seeks to disrupt the logistics, energy and transport systems that sustain them. This exposes a major vulnerability in traditional industrial military power. Russia's defence

industry relies heavily on large, concentrated industrial sites. A notable example is Uralvagonzavod in Nizhny Tagil, often described as the world's largest tank factory, employing around 30,000 workers and producing or refurbishing many of Russia's T-72, T-80 and T-90 tanks. Russia's war economy also depends on major refineries, rail hubs and large drone production facilities. These "megafactories" can generate huge military output but are difficult to conceal and expensive to defend.

Iran provides a second example of changing hard power. Iran cannot compete directly with the USA in direct military terms, as seen by the rapid American destruction of Iran's conventional navy and its inability to prevent the aerial bombardment of Tehran and other military and political targets. However, it has developed drones, missiles and proxy networks that allow it to challenge stronger opponents indirectly. The Shahed-136 drone is estimated to cost roughly \$20,000-\$50,000, while a Patriot interceptor used to destroy it can cost approximately \$4 million. This asymmetry allowed Iran to effectively close the Strait of Hormuz to international shipping by imposing a level of threat that meant that cargo was uninsurable. This demonstrates how weaker actors can force stronger states to spend vastly greater resources simply to maintain defence. Military power increasingly involves imposing unsustainable costs on an opponent rather than defeating them conventionally.

These developments suggest that new military frontiers are emerging. Advances in drones, artificial intelligence, autonomy and precision strike technology have altered the relationship between military expenditure and military effectiveness. Smaller powers can increasingly threaten infrastructure, logistics and industrial capacity without possessing large conventional armies. The most important measure of military power may no longer be the size of a state's armed forces, but its ability to innovate and create favourable cost exchanges.

However, it would be inaccurate to conclude that traditional military power has become irrelevant. Russia continues to occupy significant areas of Ukrainian territory because of its superior manpower, artillery and industrial resources. Similarly, the USA remains the world's most powerful military actor because of its nuclear arsenal, global military bases, aircraft carrier groups and alliance network. Drones and asymmetric capabilities can complicate military operations, but they have not replaced conventional armed forces.

What does the Trump-Meloni row indicate about global governance?

3.2 - Global governance: political and economic

3.6 - Comparative theories

A public dispute between US President Donald Trump and Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni has highlighted growing tensions within the G7 and raised questions about the effectiveness of global governance. The row escalated after Trump claimed that Meloni had begged "over and over" for a photograph with him at the June 2026 G7 summit in Évian-les-Bains. He suggested she sought political advantage because she was "doing poorly" in Italy. Meloni responded that Trump had "totally invented" the story.

While the dispute appears personal, it reflects wider tensions within the Western alliance. Trump also criticised Italy for refusing to provide unrestricted access to military facilities for US operations against Iran, highlighting disagreements over security policy among allies. Such divisions can weaken the ability of major democracies to coordinate responses to international crises.

The significance of the row lies in what it reveals about global governance. The G7 depends on cooperation, trust and consensus between leading democratic states. Public disputes between leaders can undermine the credibility of international institutions and make collective decision-making more difficult. From a realist perspective, the dispute demonstrates that states prioritise national interests over institutional solidarity.

However, the disagreement does not signal the collapse of global governance. Italy remains a member of both the G7 and NATO, and cooperation continues on security, trade and diplomacy. Nevertheless, the episode highlights how nationalism, personality politics and leadership rivalries can complicate international cooperation and reduce the effectiveness of global governance.

