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Hello everyone! Welcome to the first issue of DEBAT 2025-2026! As this new academic year begins and the world becomes increasingly chaotic, I believe it is essential to present new ideas, narratives and perspectives to challenge and broaden our view of the world. Hence, DEBAT! As a magazine for students, by students, our goal is to blend narratives from around the world into one melting pot of ideas. As such, I want to thank the amazing team of writers, editors and designers for bringing this first issue to life.

We start off the academic year by presenting a theme that's increasingly present in today's politics: divisions. From international relations to our personal lives, these fragmentations are increasingly present, impacting us in every aspect. This edition will reveal different aspects from this theme, each with their own unique lens on the divergent topics. While exploring a wide range of perspectives and article formats, I hope this issue will be as informative as entertaining.

A big thanks to you, readers, for taking interest in the magazine! I hope you enjoy reading it as much as I enjoyed creating it!

Celia, Co-Editor-in-Chief

Hallo allemaal! Welkom bij de eerste uitgave van DEBAT 2025-2026! Nu het nieuwe academische jaar begint en de wereld steeds chaotischer wordt, geloof ik dat het essentieel is om nieuwe ideeën, narratieven en en perspectieven te presenteren om onze visie van de wereld aan te scherpen en te verbreden. Dus, DEBAT! Als tijdschrift voor en door studenten worden narratieven vanuit de hele wereld samengebracht in een smeltkroes van ideeën. Daarom wil ik graag de fantastische schrijf-, redactie-, en ontwerpteams bedanken voor het tot stand brengen van deze uitgave.

We beginnen dit academische jaar met een thema dat in toenemende mate aanwezig is in de hedendaagse politiek: scheidslijnen. Van internationale relaties tot ons persoonlijke leven zijn deze scheidslijnen, die ons op alle aspecten beïnvloeden, in toenemende mate aanwezig. Deze uitgave zal de verschillende kanten van dit thema belichten, met elk zijn eigen unieke invalshoek op de verschillende onderwerpen. Terwijl we een breed scala aan perspectieven en artikelformats verkennen, hoop ik dat deze uitgave zowel informatief als vermakelijk is.

Heel erg bedankt aan U de lezer voor uw interesse in dit blad! Ik hoop dat u evenveel geniet van het lezen, als ik gedaan heb bij het maken van dit blad!

Celia, Co-Hoofdreacteur

Colofon | Colophon
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DEBAT

Contents | Inhoud

4 From pillars to polarisation
Emma Hagenaars

5 De kloof tussen jongeren en de politiek
Maj Jolij

6 Cyprus, between two nations
Beatriz Santos Mayo

8 Love in the time of political polarization
Pola Michałek

9 Radicalisation in Brazil Through the Lens of American Politics
Piotr Leligdowicz

10 Hoe een welvaartskloof studenten massaal op de been bracht
Chiury de Nijs

12 Everyone gets a Mango!
Mark van Donk & Hidde Heijerman

14 Is Hungary's populist façade crumbling? A future of democracy or divide
Hanna Juházs

16 Political Science Worldwide
Elizabeth O'Mara

18 Navalny's Russia: When Dissent Becomes Betrayal
Leontine Fischer

19 Tussen orde en chaos: Provo als symbool van verdeeld Nederland
Summer Knegtmans

20 How united is Germany today, 35 years after reunification?
Leo Gebauer

22 Lokale politici en de impact van polarisatie
Carlinho Westerveld

24 The Home Advantage: Why Family Background Still Decides
Emilia Mager

26 Trapped in the Manosphere: how social media shapes young boys today
Ella Teague

27 "It is shameful to raise concerns about the safety of our trains"Foreshadowing tragedy and division
Anna Maria Balaska

28 Taft vs Teddy: A Story of U.S. Intra-Party Division
Laurens Goddijn

30 Is France really secular
Celia Hiver

From Pillars to Polarization

By Emma Hagenaars

In recent years, concern about polarization has grown in the Netherlands. Polarization refers to the process in which society and politics are increasingly framed in terms of 'us' versus 'them'. Three-quarters of Dutch people think that differences in opinions (regarding i.e. immigration and climate) have increased. Although there is a long Dutch tradition of coming to a consensus or compromise (often referred to as the 'poldermodel'), the social dynamics are shifting. Social media are emphasizing the divisions between people through the creation of online bubbles.

The Netherlands has always been a divided country. Until the 1960s, there was pillarization. Dutch society was divided into four groups: Protestants, Catholics, Liberals and Socialists. These groups barely interacted; they had their own schools, social institutions, television and radio broadcasters. They were divided along religious lines (Protestant-Catholic) and along social class (Liberal-Socialist). Although people are not religiously divided anymore, there are societal splits.

Today, people are divided by their feelings on certain political issues, such as those related to gender. This feeling of being divided is called affective polarization. It can lead to feelings of resentment towards the group that disagrees with you. If this division is encouraged by politicians, which can make political processes, such as coalition formation, very difficult. Additionally, these feelings of resentment could even lead to violence between the opposing societal groups.

This affective polarization is emphasized by social media. Algorithms on these platforms reinforce existing preferences; someone who supports the right-wing PVV party will likely see posts that reaffirm their preferences and views, while that user will rarely see posts by a supporter of left-wing parties, like D66. Instead of a public debate where your views are challenged, the narratives you already believe are simply reinforced. Additionally, these 'bubbles' created by social media platforms can extend into actual life. For example, big cities like Amsterdam or Utrecht are strongly progressive and left-wing, while rural voters tend to be more right-wing and conservative. Not only do you not interact with different opinions online, but you also don't encounter people with different opinions on the street. This can make different voices seem strange or scary, which can prevent a shared understanding and, in turn, lead to potential hate.

As stated previously, many Dutch people feel that polarization is a big problem and has gotten worse. However, to what extent is this concern justified, and has the situation truly worsened? There have always been differences in opinions; that is not new. The main topic of political debate has shifted from socio-economic issues (i.e., income differences) towards cultural issues (i.e., migration and European integration), but disagreements on political issues have always existed. Additionally, the horizontal polarization is in reality not that high. Horizontal polarization refers to the actual disagreements between voters, while affective polarization refers to the feeling of being divided. What truly causes people to experience polarization is their perception of it in politics: the increasingly fierce tone of the debates and actions of politicians who exacerbate divisions and create a rift among citizens.

While divisions certainly exist, they are also to be shaped by personal perceptions, the media and politics.

De kloof tussen jongeren en de politiek

Door Maj Jolij

VS

Voor studenten politicologie is politiek ontzettend interessant, maar toch zijn er ook veel jongeren die er helemaal niet zo over denken. Uit een onderzoek van het Erasmus SYNC-lab in samenwerking met het Hot Politics Lab blijkt dat slechts 30% van de jongeren tussen 10 en 25 jaar in Rotterdam geïnteresseerd is in de Nederlandse politiek. Naast de lage politieke interesse, zien we al een aantal jaar een trend waarbij jongeren minder stemmen dan ouderen. Dit verschil in verkiezingsopkomst tussen jongere en oudere generaties is problematisch. Op dit moment is ruim de helft van de stemgerechtigden ouder dan 50 jaar. Door de vergrijzing en de groeiende kloof tussen jongeren en de politiek, zal het politieke evenwicht tussen jong en oud verder uit balans raken, waardoor jongeren ondergerepresenteerd zullen worden in de politiek.

Een van de belangrijkste oorzaken van de kloof tussen jongeren en de politiek is dat jongeren zich vaak niet gehoord of niet goed vertegenwoordigd voelen. Dit komt bijvoorbeeld doordat de politieke focus vaak op de korte termijn ligt voor electoraal gewin en jongeren zich vooral veel bezig houden met hun toekomst. Dit was duidelijk zichtbaar bij het Pointer verkiezingsdebat van dinsdag 30 september waarbij 100 jongeren in debat gingen met politici van VVD, CDA, GroenLinks-PVDA en D66. De jongeren maken zich voornamelijk zorgen over de huizencrisis, het klimaat en of ze wel rond kunnen komen in een tijd waarin alles duurder wordt. Verder geven jongeren in een onderzoek van de UVA aan dat ze weinig vertrouwen in hun eigen invloed hebben. Ze geloven dat hun stem geen invloed heeft, omdat ze vinden dat de politiek weinig voor elkaar krijgt en hun beloftes niet nakomen. Ook zeggen ze (te) weinig kennis over politiek te hebben. Ze benoemen hierbij dat ze op school “niet genoeg geleerd hebben over de politiek” of “niet slim genoeg zijn” om over politiek te praten. Dit is erg zorgelijk.

Hoewel de verkiezingsopkomst onder jongeren lager is dan onder oudere generaties, zien we dat jongeren participeren op andere manieren. Het CBS meldt dat politieke participatie het afgelopen decennium groeide in onconventionele vormen, zoals actiegroepen, demonstraties en handtekeningenacties, waarbij de grootste groep die hieraan deelneemt studenten zijn. Dit kan worden gezien als een oorzaak van de lagere verkiezingsopkomst onder de jongere generatie. Ze kiezen er simpelweg voor om te participeren op een andere manier dan stemmen. We zien echter dat de kans om te gaan stemmen juist groter is onder jongeren die producten boycotten, politieke berichten op internet plaatsen, deelnemen aan demonstraties of petities ondertekenen. Maar, dit betekent ook dat nog veel jongeren niet geïnteresseerd zijn in de politiek en dus niet stemmen. Hierdoor houdt de kloof tussen hen en de politiek stand.

Om deze kloof te dichten, is verandering nodig. Zo moeten politici meer luisteren naar de jonge generatie, want als zij zich meer gehoord voelen, zullen ze sneller stemmen. Ook zouden meer lessen over politiek op school helpen, zeker voor leerlingen met een lager opleidingsniveau. Zij voelen zich nu vaak ‘niet slim genoeg’ om deel te nemen aan de politiek. Tot slot, moet de politiek voor jongeren laagdrempeliger en begrijpelijker worden, waar sociale media een rol bij kunnen spelen.

Cyprus, Between Two Nations

By Beatriz Santos Mayo

In 1989, while the Berlin Wall was falling and Europe saw its desire for future integration being met, Cyprus stayed stuck. After Berlin's reunification, Nicosia is considered to be the only divided capital left in Europe. The capital is split by the Green Line that extends across the island. The line was established by the United Nations (UN) in the 1960s to act as a buffer zone separating the Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot communities after an escalation of violence.

Historical Background

After Cyprus' independence from Britain in the 1960s, disagreements over governance led to intercommunal violence in 1963. In the early 1970s, the Greek Cypriots established closer ties with Greece, while the Turkish Cypriots wanted to protect their own interests. The conflict climaxed in 1974 with a Greek-backed coup that provoked a military intervention from Türkiye. The confrontation ended with the island's partition. In the aftermath of the conflict, the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC) was declared, but is only recognized by Türkiye, leaving it isolated with only flights from and to Turkish territory. The UN buffer zone was expanded to prevent fighting, but it increased the division, locking Cyprus into decades of division.

Nowadays, that division remains at the center of politics. The European Union (EU) has failed to bridge the divide. The EU accession negotiations have been on an extended coffee break since 2016 for Türkiye. The negotiations started in 2005, right after Cyprus joined in 2004, but the "Cyprus Issue", together with some disagreements between Brussels and Ankara, froze the talks. Of course, Cyprus' accession was a historic step, but it appears that the conflict is far from being resolved. Professor of Politics Nugent explained that EU membership was supposed to give Greek Cypriots a stronger hand. Let's say, a diplomatic shield against Turkish pressure. But that sense of protection left little to no room for peace talks.

In February 2023, Nikos Christodoulides was elected President of Cyprus after being supported by centrist-right-wing parties. He promised dialogue and a new push for peace. Words that sound good in Brussels, and of course better in Nicosia, but as always, it takes two to tango. With elections in the TRNC coming up this October, hopes are flickering once again. Yet, history has shown that sometimes leadership changes are not enough, but might this be an exception to the rule?

Peace negotiations

The most important step for a peace settlement was in 2004, with the Annan Plan. They were drafted under the guidance of the back-then United Nations Secretary General Kofi Annan. This plan outlined a detailed framework for a bicommunal state, with power-sharing mechanisms. .

The plan was resolved through two referendums. The results were that 64 percent of Turkish Cypriots voted in favour, but 76 percent of Greek Cypriots rejected it. The latter raised concerns over security, property rights, and governance. This result represented the mistrust and different visions for the island's future.

In 2008, the Greek Cypriot leader, Dimitris Christofias, and Turkish Cypriot leader Mehmet Ali Talat expressed hopes for dialogue by drafting a joint declaration that advocated for such. However, given the political divisions within each community, the talks stalled once again. In 2017, the Crans-Montana talks in Switzerland brought together the Greek Cypriot leader Nicos Anastasiades and Turkish Cypriot leader Mustafa Akıncı, alongside representatives from Greece, Türkiye, and the United Kingdom. For a moment, optimism returned to the table. Yet, after several days of negotiation, the discussions collapsed.

During the talks, Ankara really insisted on keeping the troops and the intervention rights, clashing with the demands from Athens for property restitution.

Each side accused the other, and the UN politely called it "the closing of a window of opportunity".

But let's be honest, it felt more like a door slammed shut. The aftermath consisted of the UN peacekeepers from the United Nations Peacekeeping Force in Cyprus (UNFICYP) restarting their patrols along the buffer zone.

Memory Politics

The Cyprus conflict is shaped by how each community remembers its past. For the Greek Cypriots, history is often told through Hellenismos. This is the idea of cultural and political unity with Greece. After World War I, the British tolerance for Greek nationalism allowed the growth of Enosis (union with Greece). Right-wing parties and the Orthodox Church took it as a national mission, while the left argued it mainly serve political elites. After Cyprus gained independence, cultural festivals started to dissociate with the idea of Enosis. The feeling of independence was so influential that even Archbishop Makarios started to promote an independent Cyprus.

On the other hand, Turkish Cypriots built their identity under the Ottoman millet system, which organized communities by religion. Under British rule, they were a minority and often felt threatened by the rising Greek nationalism. The violence in the 1950s drove them towards taksim (partition) and armed resistance through the Türk Mukavemet Teşkilatı (TMT - The Turkish Resistance Organization). The 1974 intervention by Türkiye reinforced memories of suffering and protection, creating a deep link with the so-called motherland. Since the 2000s, more Turkish Cypriots have focused on their own distinctiveness and look towards a federal and EU-oriented future.

Future

The upcoming October elections in the TRNC are framed by the international press as a turning point. The elections are as polarized as the Cyprus issue. On the one side, we have the current President, Ersin Tartar, who defends equal sovereignty and has pushed for international recognition. He closely aligns with its counterpart in Turkiye, which calls for a two-state solution. On the other hand, we have Tufan Erhüman, who advocates for a return to diplomatic talks with the Greek Cypriots and the establishment of federation governments.

In Brussels, the plan remains cautious. Yet the rhetoric on "confidence-building" sounds really far from the reality of the divided Nicosia. Across the Atlantic, Cyprus is a top priority for Washington. Policy-makers have noted that the strategic position of the island and its role as an energy corridor could be used by the US as a wildcard. Meanwhile, while global attention is shifting almost every day, continuing to ignore Cyprus any longer is a risk Brussels and the world cannot take.

Love in the Time of Political Polarization

By Pola Michałek

In everyday conversations about politics, our society tends to speak in terms of right and wrong, of good and bad. We all have used these generalizations. That can, undoubtedly, be credited to the phenomenon of political polarization. How much has that taken away from our relationships? Is the solution to our problems the removal of politics from our private lives altogether? Can a middle ground still be found between a blind acceptance and complete intolerance of opposing views?

Maybe you are the problem?

At the beginning of this year, a journalist from Cosmopolitan magazine conducted a personal experiment where she tried to date people on the extreme opposite of her political spectrum. She signed up for conservative dating apps and went out with men she matched with. From her perspective, the major underlying feeling she observed in the men she went out with was isolation, which she realized inflamed their intolerance towards potential differences in potential partners and people in general. To come to some kind of conclusion on the men's behalf was, seeing the implicit hypothesis of this experiment, an easy thing to do. But what really spoke out from the piece is how her own political bubble had burst, and how she began to reevaluate it again for the first time in a while.

"Who you voted for tells me all about you"

The issue surrounding the debate - political polarization - can be generally defined as extreme division within a given population along conventionally accepted party lines. It is more than politics that explains our political choices, a notion that we are all acutely aware of. However, nowadays, who we vote for is primarily based on our ideas of what we consider good and bad. Today, it is more than certain that this idea is fundamentally different in a political party identifying on one end of the conventional spectrum, and on the other. The all-or-nothing dynamic has been seen as short-term beneficial to political parties in the last 20 years. The effect it has on families and relationships, however, is seen as sociologically detrimental. People voting differently from their partner are seen as afraid to admit who they voted for. Family dinners have become a joke in terms of the divisions and fights that have become the honorary guests.

Escaping generalizations

In 2024, the Council on Contemporary Families identified that out of half of all adults who were estranged from their families, a fifth of them identified political differences as a cause behind the decision to cut off their relatives. The lack of nuance in not only the political discourse but also the personal thought process is said to be one of the contributors to such circumstances. We cannot be blamed for the current political parties' sluggish tendencies to gain votes through polarizing society rather than doing so in good faith, which allows for leaving space for critical thinking and agreeing to disagree. In this case, though, the choice on the politics of love is ours, and not of political parties.

Radicalisation in Brazil Through the Lens of American Politics

By Piotr Leligdowicz

It has always been a recurring trend in international politics that ideological shifts in influential states are mirrored in other nations within their so-called "sphere of influence". Particularly, the ascent of Donald Trump and his populist movement to the American presidency in 2016 has had a serious role in creating the global wave of radicalisation we see in almost every corner of the world today. In almost no other nation has this had such a profound impact as in Brazil and its divisive political sphere.

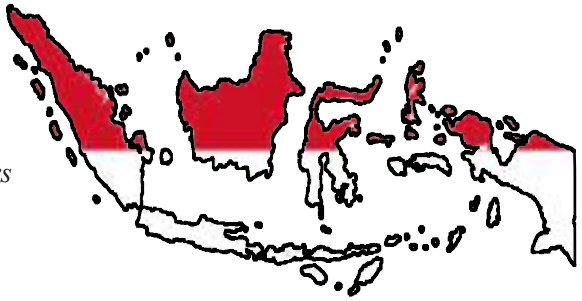
Brazil's current political environment mimics the United States of America's (USA) in an uncanny manner, down to specific events and individuals. Former president Jair Bolsonaro, whose policies, mannerisms, and cult-like following have been compared to Trump's, lost the 2022 election to his rival Lula da Silva. Bolsonaro's supporters rejected the results and stormed Brasília's government buildings, vocally taking inspiration from the 2021 January 6th US Capitol insurrection. Bolsonaro's far-right movement and its followers strongly believe in election-related conspiracies and glorify Bolsonaro to an almost religious degree. They also regularly fly the flag of the Brazilian Empire, drawing similarity to how Trump's supporters fly the Confederate flag. Additionally, both leaders display highly similar figures of speech when addressing the public, such as appeals to emotion, scapegoating or diverting blame. These are classic methods employed by populist politicians worldwide. Furthermore, just as social media was crucial in the creation of division in the USA, it was also heavily used in orchestrating Brazil's attack. It continues to radicalise young people through extremist influencers such as Nikolas Ferreira, whose views and target audience could draw comparisons to the late Charlie Kirk. Trump's continuous endorsement of Bolsonaro has led the Brazilian's supporters to display American flags side-by-side with Brazilian ones, clearly displaying the similarity between the two movements.

Recently, however, a divergence has formed in Brazil from the USA's path, as Bolsonaro was convicted of attempting a coup and sentenced to 27 years in prison. This contrasts with Trump, who was accused of the same and faced many legal battles but got off pretty much scot-free. Spearheaded by Lula and Supreme Court justice Alexandre de Moraes, who led Bolsonaro's trial and sentencing, the case might face overturning if a bill is instated that permits lawmakers to block prosecutions. Bolsonaro will thus be freed if this happens, as his party still crucially holds the most seats in parliament. Ironically, Moraes was banned from entering the US by President Trump due to this ruling. While his supporters defend the bill under the guise of free speech and defending democracy, opponents of Bolsonaro reaffirm his criminality and reject the bill, organising counter-protests.

These events have had a profound effect on Brazil's foreign policy and relations. Apart from an obvious schism with the USA since Lula's election and Bolsonaro's conviction, there has been a recent move towards BRICS and the EU. Brazil's position geographically, however, means that relations with the USA are inevitable. Many argue that it is in the current government's interest for them to be ameliorated, which, with the current US tariff hostility, remains unlikely. This leaves Brazil navigating a rather unstable geopolitical environment, having to balance internal and external affairs precisely. Ultimately, the Bolsonaro case has shown just how influential radicalism in the USA has been in Brazil and beyond.

Hoe een welvaartskloof studenten massaal op de been bracht

Door Chiury de Nijs



In Indonesië is er sprake van een enorme kloof op het gebied van welvaart en welzijn: politici die flaneren met hun welvaart, miljardairs die belasting ontwijken en bezuinigingen op sociale voorzieningen brachten in Jakarta de vlam in de pan.

In Jakarta schoot de vlam in de pan, en later verspreidde die grote vonk zich naar de rest van de Indonesische eilandengroep. Provinciale parlementshuizen werden in de fik gezet, demonstranten gingen op de vuist met politieagenten en de huizen van parlementsleden en ministers werden bekogeld, bestormd en bestolen. De Indonesische studentenprotesten tussen augustus en september waren ongehoord. Hoe had dit kunnen ontstaan? En wat dreef deze massale mobilisatie van studenten?

Het begon met het aantreden van de huidige president, Prabowo Subianto Djojohadikusumo, voor het gemak noemen we hem gewoon Prabowo. Prabowo is een oud-generaal die diende onder zijn schoonvader, oud-president Soeharto. Soeharto was een generaal die na afloop van een mislukte communistische coup, met behulp van de CIA, de macht greep en een militair regime stichtte: de nieuwe orde. De nieuwe orde (orde baru) was synoniem voor grootschalige corruptie, mensenrechtenschendingen en territoriaal expansionisme. Ongeveer anderhalf miljoen 'communistische sympathisanten' verloren het leven vanwege buitengerechtelijke executies, op commando van Soeharto. In de latere dagen werd Prabowo stafchef van een elite-eenheid van het leger, die ook verantwoordelijk was voor groteske mensenrechtenschendingen. Horror, zou je zeggen. Maar niet voor Prabowo. Prabowo zag die militaire politiestaat als verloren Indonesische gloriedagen. Studenten zien het als een dystopie à la George Orwell. Niet alleen Prabowo's carrière, maar ook de aanloop van de afgelopen verkiezingen zijn belangrijk om de woede van deze studenten te begrijpen.

Prabowo stond, voordat hij president werd, twee keer op de kieslijst voor president. Pas na zijn derde poging lukte het hem, maar wel met behulp van zijn voorganger, president Jokowi. Jokowi was populair en versloeg Prabowo dik tijdens de verkiezingen. Hij was niet zomaar populair, Jokowi had een approval rating van 80.8% aan het einde van zijn termijn. Dat zijn cijfers waar Dick Schoof alleen maar van kan dromen. Daarom werkte Prabowo samen met Jokowi om van zijn derde presidentscampagne een succes te maken. Er was wel een quid-pro-quo: de oudste zoon van Jokowi, Gibran, moest dan zijn vicepresidentskandidaat zijn. Aanvankelijk was hij te jong om vicepresident te worden, maar in een controversiële uitspraak werd de leeftijdsgrens verlaagd door het grondwettelijk hof. De opperrechter van dat hof was de zwager van president Jokowi. Dit nepotistische rechtsbesluit leidde tot grote woede onder studenten en academici.

Het paar Prabowo-Gibran won ruimschoots de verkiezingen. Prabowo kapitaliseerde veel op het erfgoed van zijn voorganger. Hij beloofde zijn nalatenschap voort te zetten. En met alle recht konden Indonesiërs tevreden zijn met die erfenis. De economie groeide hard, het aantal mensen onder de armoedegrens dook voor het eerst onder 10% en er waren grote infrastructuurprojecten, waaronder een nieuwe hoofdstad en een hogesnelheidstrein. De Indonesiër zou het alleen maar beter krijgen. Maar, aan de andere kant van de munt had Jokowi ook de verloedering van de democratie en de rechtsstaat op zijn rekening staan. Hij maakte de anti-corruptie commissie machteloos waardoor corruptie en incompetentie toenam, een move om zijn beleidsstukken zo snel mogelijk door te voeren. Als reactie hierop gingen toen ook al studenten massaal de straat op. Corruptie en vriendjespolitiek hebben een slecht effect op de sociale ladder – iets wat juist onder druk staat – daardoor blijft het een terugkerend thema in de studentenprotesten, nu ook.

Als president rolde Prabowo een ambitieuze agenda uit. Militairen kregen hoge posities in het kabinet en verkiezingsbeloftes zoals gratis schoollunches voor scholieren werden ingevoerd. Maar toen kwam de economische realiteit aan het licht: de economische groei nam terug, de werkloosheid steeg en de koopkracht daalde. In dat licht besloot het Indonesische Parlement zichzelf een woontoelage toe te kennen van drieduizend euro en dat is tien keer het minimumloon in de hoofdstad. Dat, terwijl al veel politici op sociale media flaneren met hun welvaart, bijvoorbeeld de ene had een insta-account voor zijn 12 katten en de ander een collectie van sportauto's. Er ontstond een duidelijke tweedeling: de politieke elite die zichzelf financiële welvaart kan toekennen en gewone mensen die dat niet kunnen.

Studenten die het spuugzat waren trokken eind augustus weer de straat op. Ze demonstreerden tegen deze beleidsmaatregelen, militarisatie, democratische achteruitgang en toelagen die zij zagen als 'empathieloos'. Ze demonstreerden tegen de corruptie en tegen nepotisme. De politieke elite zou het mandaat hebben verloren omdat parlementariërs zich verrijken in tijden waarin veel Indonesiërs in armoede vielen. Daarom riepen veel demonstranten op om het parlement te ontbinden. Als gevolg van deze protesten trad de Indonesische politie hardhandig op.

In de chaos van demonstraties werkten veel mensen gewoon door, zoals maaltijdbezorgers en straatverkopers. Maar de demonstraties kregen gauw een andere wending. Tijdens een van de demonstraties reed een politievoertuig over een maaltijdbezorger heen die in de menigte was beland. De dood van Affan Kurniawan deed de opborrelende woede onder Indonesiërs exploderen. Als gevolg hiervan werden provinciale parlementsgebouwen in brand gestoken en de huizen van prominente politici geplunderd. De twaalf katten werden ontvoerd en de sportwagens vernield. De demonstranten hadden 25 eisen voorgesteld. 17 voorstellen op de korte termijn en 8 voorstellen op de lange termijn. Daaronder viel financiële steun voor sociale zekerheid, maar ook structurele hervorming van het parlement en de politie. Daarnaast moest er een onderzoek komen naar corruptie binnen de overheid en politiegeweld. President Prabowo hield zijn poot stijf en had alleen bepaalde economische eisen ingewilligd die de koopkracht moesten verbeteren, daarnaast zette hij een streep door de woontoelage. Maar, hij kopte de protesten ook hardhandig in.

Deze protesten hadden iets anders kunnen inluiden dan wat het huidige resultaat is. Ze pleitten voor een kanteling van de welvaartsverdeling en democratische achteruitgang. President Prabowo antwoordde echter met hardhandig politieoptreden en surveillance. De protesten van afgelopen augustus leidden tot 10 doden en het stationeren van drieduizend militairen in Jakarta die op elk moment konden ingrijpen. Hierdoor ebden de protesten weg vanwege deze grote druk, maar de onvrede niet. Op de achtergrond staat een steeds krimpende middenklasse, een grotere kloof in inkomensongelijkheid en de verdere militarisering van de Indonesische samenleving.

Hoewel Prabowo nog meer concessies gaf, zo ontsloeg hij de politieagenten die Kurniawan hadden gedood, begint Indonesië weer te lijken op Orde Baru waarin protesten fel worden onderdrukt en het leger weer een prominente rol krijgt in de maatschappij. De geschiedenis herhaalt zich nooit, maar rijmt wel altijd. Het is onmiskenbaar dat er parallellen zijn tussen Prabowo's presidentschap en de dictatuur van Soeharto. Misschien is dit voor Prabowo juist de herrijzenis van de Indonesische gloriedagen.

Everyone gets a Mango!

By Mark van Donk & Hidde Heijerman

Should high incomes be taxed more?

Dear Hidde,

Looking at the radical growth of income inequality in the Netherlands, I propose a higher taxation of the wealthiest people in our country. According to the Dutch Bureau of Statistics (CBS) the 10% richest households own around 50% of all the capital of the country. Even more concerning is the fact that 10% of capital is owned by around 0,1% of the households. With that in mind it is unacceptable that around 540.000 people in the Netherlands live in poverty, including 115.000 children. Poverty has a significant effect on their development, according to Kinderhulp they score lower grades at school, get low paying jobs and on average they tend to suffer more health ailments. Additionally, around 144.000 people need assistance from the food bank, 15% of them were under the age of 18. If we place this in the perspective that some people are able to go on holiday multiple times a year and that their only concern is what colour their newest sportscar should be, it is outrageous that quite a lot of people live in such poverty as described before. To solve this problem, I propose an increase in taxation on the wealthiest people of our country. In practice we could raise the tax on capital, implement a progressive taxation according to income and raise the inheritance taxation. With this change in taxation the wealthiest people will be taxed far more fairly than they are at this moment. With this extra tax revenue, the government should invest in the people who need this the most. In turn, the government could lower income taxes so working will pay off more, raise rent allowances and abolish the healthcare deductible.

I'd like to hear from you! Mark

Dear Mark,

The Dutch taxation system is already quite progressive, and considering people's personal labour, I respectfully disagree with your proposition that taxes should be hiked. The Netherlands belongs to the wealthiest countries in the world with our low Gini coefficient of 0.285, and this is one of the higher estimates, which indicates that this wealth is distributed in a relatively fair way. In fact, we belong to the top 6 countries in wealth equality. Naturally, the fact that our country is more progressive on this issue than its peers does not lighten the burden of the group you have so poignantly described. But, it does illustrate that this inequality is not as great as you describe it. Yes, our Gini coefficient concerning assets or capital is much higher at 0.711, but two facts are important to note: this coefficient is quickly declining due to inflation on the housing market, and this coefficient is by far not as relevant as actual income, since capital is not a readily disposable form of wealth and is not the primary form of income for most Dutch people. Aside from this factual analysis of how low actual inequality is in the Netherlands, I must also morally defend the current system of taxation. Yes, an increased income tax could provide the government with the means to take care of more people who are less well-off. Yet, aside from those less able to do so, shouldn't people work to earn their own money? Is earning one's living through working not the true merit of labour? And would the unemployed not be discouraged from working by such benefits? And is it then 'fair' to sustain these potential employees with the fruits of another man's labour?

Enjoying this discussion!
Hidde

Dear Hidde,

Your argumentation raises some questions since you state that inflation on the housing market contributed to a decline in the Gini coefficient concerning assets or capital. As I stated before, the richest 10% of households own around 50% of all the capital of the country. So, through your logic this inflation has benefited the richest of our country and not the less wealthy, enlarging inequality. Raising taxation on capital and lowering income tax would stimulate working, like you advocate, and would result in a fairer taxation system according to people's financial abilities. Lastly, I would like to ask you if you think that the 540,000 people in our country who live in poverty deserve to stay in this way of living if we were able to solve this by raising taxes on the wealthiest people?
Thank you for the discussion on this topic!
Mark

Dear Mark,

I appreciate your previous arguments. In response, I would like to address that the widening or narrowing of inequality is a matter of fact, substantiated by the Dutch Bureau of Statistics or 'CBS'. Your claim that rising house prices only enrich the richest is thus factually incorrect, but this is a matter of economic theory which I'd like to discuss with you some other time. Moreover, I would like to focus on your argument that raising capital gains tax and lowering income tax would stimulate working. I have to admit, your last point is valid. Increasing direct income by tax cuts stimulates people to work! By creating a gap between the minimum income and the benefits provided by the government, people are given an incentive to work. Lowering subsidies and heightening the minimum wage would thus be my preferred direction for social welfare policy, while maintaining the status quo on for example, inheritance or dividend tax. In a nutshell, you claim that the fate of 540,000 people is dependent on the choice to tax the wealthy. Yet, as I have demonstrated, the relative poverty of this group is low! A large part of this group is in fact capable of working and is not incentivized to find work due to the unfair distribution of welfare-benefits! And lastly, can the suffering of 500.000 people truly be alleviated, if government bureaucracy and countless other spending priorities leave only a marginal fraction of the taxes on rightfully earned money? I am happy that we agree that people should be incentivised to work by lowering income taxes and I am convinced that the extra economic output generated by the economy with such a policy would easily outweigh the loss in direct tax revenue for the government. In the meantime, we can let people also enjoy the wealth they have earned through other means.

Thank you too for debating with me!
Kind regards,
Hidde

Is Hungary's Populist Façade Crumbling? – A future of democracy or divide

By Hanna Juhász

Described as "one of the most respected men" and a "strong" leader on the international stage by US President Donald Trump, Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán has been at the forefront of the country's politics for more than 15 years. He has acted as a steering wheel for shaping public opinion and guiding Hungary from the suppression of decades of communism, on a path that he considered "forward and not behind". Nonetheless, as the momentum of liberation from Russia had drawn out its last breath, he has turned his sight to a more well-trodden trail travelled by many a tempted politician: one heavily lined with corruption, conspiracy, and shrewd calculation. However, despite the entrenched attitudes of passive resignation to a system that was viewed as merely one amongst the many oppressive regimes in its history, Hungary finds itself at crossroads today: one that is as much political, as it is economic, cultural and generational. There is no more denial of the divide involuntarily sparked by Fidesz between the old and the young, the capital and the countryside and the rich and poor. These clashes of ideas and values are especially worth noting, as their outcome will determine a country's future with political implications on Central-Eastern Europe as a whole. Originally established to create Hungary's new future on the foundations of peace and democracy, and inspired by the progressive ideas of its youth, the ruling party Fidesz is paradoxically threatened by the same young generation today. The growing voices of youth are evident as recent developments demonstrate the weakening nationalist grip on power. The Budapest Pride March of 28th June 2025 is the most timely reflection of the backlash against the government, aspiring to trim freedom of speech and assembly, in the form of eliminating LGBTQ+ rights. With an unprecedented participation of 200.000 citizens despite threats of fines and arrests for attending a previously banned event, university students and young adults represented themselves in the thousands, equipped with banners featuring critical messages, setting an anti-government tone to the event. In the city of the party's heart, Budapest mayor Gergely Karácsony made an important public statement by supporting and encouraging the event, explicitly affirming that "neither freedom nor love can be banned in Budapest". The failed attempt of the National Bureau of Investigation to make him accountable illustrates dissipating societal fear of dissenting, and encourages all citizens to stand up to injustice – sharpening the division between civil society and the political elite. Apart from direct confrontation, dissatisfaction and demand for democracy found more subtle forms of expression, namely in the Hungarian music industry. Early in 2025, acclaimed rap artist Majka released a series of tracks imbued with profound political undertones, the most impactful of which tells a fictive story of a long-serving PM in the imagined country 'Bindzsistan' who confesses to mass corruption on live television after having been dosed with a truth serum. Immediately after its release, the song had attracted considerable attention not only from the habitual circle of young fans, but also more broadly across the country, as if Hungarians implicitly grasped the underlying message mantled in familiar lively rhythm. An uncommon governmental reaction followed, condemning Majka's song as a device by which he aimed to incite anti-government sentiment, – a fact that the artist consistently denied, claiming the song's narrative to be "completely a product of imagination". In one of his concerts, he jokingly mimicked the assassination of the stage actor portraying the fictional leader, which further aroused state media to conceive linkages between a "theatrical gag" and the real-life assassination of Viktor Orbán. Party-funded media outlets voiced severe accusations against the singer, comparing the alleged threat for the PM's life to the incidents that happened to President Trump.

This raises the question whether the party's arbitrary self-comparison with the depicted corrupt character stems from its recognition of similarities in their practices, and thus could be interpreted as an unconscious self-revelation. Amidst increasingly desperate governmental attempts to divert attention from their long-running misuse of public resources and EU funds, Orbán needs to prepare to face an emerging threat to his solidified rule reliant on harnessing unfounded fear to achieve political gains. A surprising opponent at the forefront of opposition party TISZA and once part of the Fidesz inner circle itself, disillusioned Péter Magyar is now exposing hidden truths that confirm the urgent need for change. He strives to sew up the gap of dividing opinions, connecting with both the liberal youth in cities as well as visiting impoverished Roma villages, under-maintained hospitals and schools. Though seemingly implausible, association with Orbán's policies and narratives is not entirely limited to right-wing and conservative figures in Europe and beyond, like US Vice President J. D. Vance or Geert Wilders of the Netherlands' Freedom Party. The fairly recent informal community "Fighter's Club" coordinated by party affiliates attracts many aged admirers, who ironically propagate governmental narratives that resonate with their conservative views on modern social media platforms, as well as defend the party in the face of youth-led anti-government activism. In parallel, the Prime Minister's speeches are strategically crafted to address the needs of the elderly population while deliberately amplifying the existing division between the differing political views of generations. Nevertheless, whether his "divide and rule" approach will be sufficient to counter opposition party TISZA is questionable. Recently asked about their voting intentions in an HVG poll, 51% of voters responded on backing Magyar's party, thus it is evidently taking over the lead from Fidesz, yet predicting the impending election outcomes is not easy, requiring the analysis of current trends among constituents. Indicators from the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance illustrate the regression of Hungary's democracy since 1998, the time of Orbán's first electoral victory, with the starkest decrease in "representative government, fundamental rights, checks on government power and impartial administration". Still, political opinions are significantly divided, and largely dependent on age, income status and geographical location. 45% of Hungarians aged 18 to 29 approve of the PM, in contrast with 70% among the 65+ demographic group, as shown by Pew Research Center. Similarly, rural areas account for 69% of Orbán's support, surpassing the 44% approval rate in cities and urban areas. Young adults are most likely to back TISZA, as 51% feel that " their interests are not represented in national politics", according to Youth Study Hungary: 2021 by Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung. This reveals that their majority places most trust in the EU, and the least in governmental institutions and the media, 33% seeing "force" as the only feasible option to end Orbán's predominance and merely 22% believing in the freedom and fairness of elections, whilst 81% doubts state-media reliability. After the Ministry of Justice building has been recently purchased by a high-ranking party official, this "tough" leader might inevitably see his power falter in the coming months, as the countdown for national elections is drawing to a close. To evoke the words of BBC's Budapest correspondent, April 2026 will undeniably decide the "battle for the soul of Hungary". As the purest embodiment of controversy at the focal point of public criticism, only time can tell whether the Prime Minister's past decisions may inevitably drag him down the steep slope which will terminate in the end of his notorious political Odysseia.

Political Science Worldwide

By Elizabeth O'Mara

Correcting corruption: how improving access to basic goods and services can reduce the prevalence of corruption in African countries

Postcolonisation efforts in African countries to improve public services and living standards have been impeded by the prevalence of corruption, which costs on average 25% of countries' annual GDP. This is often caused by inequality of opportunity, and the illicit provision of money, jobs and projects to the favoured few. Acts of corruption can seem more justifiable to the individuals committing them when, as on average across the African continent, 60% of the population has limited access to basic services, and problems of social justice cause disparities in living circumstances between individuals, ethnic groups and regions. Alene uses the global index of inequality on data from 40 African countries to examine the relationship between levels of corruption and inequality of opportunity, considering the percentage of people living without access to at least one of education, health, electricity, water, internet and food. There was found to be a strong positive correlation between inequality of opportunity and corruption, particularly in less developed countries. There was regional variation within this, with such issues being most prevalent in Sub-Saharan Africa and least prevalent in North Africa. To improve such issues, Alene proposes multiple different policies, such as increasing investment in basic goods and services, diversifying economies to promote formal employment, economic growth and foreign investment, and improving management of aid. These initiatives would improve access to basic services in African countries, therefore helping to reduce corruption. Alene recognises the study is limited by the fact that it did not consider all African countries or all basic goods, and states that this oversight may be subject to investigation in further studies.

Alene, L. (2025). Proliferation of corruption in Africa: The ineluctable role of inequality of opportunity. Journal of International Development, 37(7), 1473–1489. https://doi.org/10.1002/jid.70019

We stand with Ukraine, to an extent: the factors that make Ukraine's allies likely to contribute more aid

Ukraine's allies have been providing aid in the form of arms to avoid the cost of having troops abroad in active combat, but are divided regarding what level of military support external countries should be expected to provide. Massie and Tallová identify factors that lead to the provision or non-provision of aid to Ukraine from NATO countries, Australia, New Zealand, Japan and South Korea. They do so using algebraic approaches to blend quantitative and qualitative methods, standardising the aid contributed by each state to account for differences in state GDP. The authors found that states that were ideologically supportive of both Ukraine and militarism, were of close geographic proximity to the conflict and had high levels of defence spending, were more likely to make substantial contributions. States also contributed more if they perceived the conflict as an existential threat to themselves, leading to a regional divide where Eastern Europe provided the most aid. Going forward, Massie and Tallová recommend more research to be done on why outliers to these general patterns, such as Bulgaria and the United Kingdom, do not fit the general trend.

Massie, J., & Tallova, B. (2025). Friends in need, friends indeed: Explaining variation in military support to Ukraine. European Journal of International Security. https://doi.org/10.1017/eis.2025.13

We got the votes: how US political parties maximise their vote-share by manipulating electoral district lines

In the United States (US), both the Democrats and the Republicans have a history of gerrymandering, meaning they manipulate electoral district lines to maximise vote share. This gives an unfair political advantage to the incumbent political party going into the next election, as gerrymandering is rarely prevented via prosecution in US courts. Deshpande et al. take the investigation of gerrymandering one step further by mathematical testing how vulnerable redistricting maps are to votemandering, which is when parties campaign to gain more seats by circumventing fairness measures more generally. The article included the impact of campaign budget, electoral district compactness and voter turnout. Deshpande et al. found that parties can increase their campaign budget to increase votemandering efficiency. However, votemandering can be prevented by compacting the physical distance between units in electoral districts to allow for fairer and more robust maps. Additionally, increased voter turnout can simultaneously decrease the likelihood of votemandering and increase election credibility by making them more representative of the overall population. In future, Deshpande et al. suggest that scholars evaluate additional measures that account for strategic behaviour and policies to ensure electoral fairness, and stress the need for ongoing research on political manipulation in democratic systems.

Deshpande, S., Ludden, I., & Jacobson, S. (2025). Bias in the ballot: how votemandering exploits gerrymandering and campaign strategies. Annals of Operations Research, 352(1), 121–168. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10479-025-06748-9

Resisting China: What the elite of Southeast Asia think of Chinese power in the region

China's ambitions of establishing a regional order in Southeast Asia with itself at the centre have been clear for decades. If China cannot persuade Southeast Asian states, to which it has its closest geographical, cultural and historical ties, it is unlikely to attain the global leadership status it aims towards. To gauge regional views on Chinese power, Ho and Lee surveyed the political and business elites of the six Southeast Asian states who are least likely to accept Chinese regional hegemony: Thailand, Vietnam, the Philippines, Indonesia, Singapore and Malaysia. All respondents ranked the regional political and cultural influence of ASEAN ahead of China, partly due to China's aggressive foreign policy in the region, particularly in the South China Sea. Respondents identified more with 'liberal democratic values' such as democracy, freedom of expression and human rights than they did with 'China's political views' of hierarchy and centralisation of authority. Reviewing the survey, Ho and Lee produced policy recommendations for Southeast Asian states, China and the US. In Southeast Asia, states should continue to strengthen ASEAN, which is the preferred vehicle for states to conduct business with each other and external powers, to guard the region against Chinese single-power dominance. For China, Ho and Lee recommend that it build trust and legitimacy by demonstrating greater power restraint, particularly in the South China Sea. China should also demonstrate greater cultural sensitivity, support diversity and make concrete contributions to building ASEAN unity and centrality. Finally, if the US wishes to prevent Chinese dominance in Southeast Asia, it needs to focus more on bilaterally engaging with ASEAN and building the organisation's resilience against China.

Ho, S., & Lee, T. (2025). Elite perceptions of a China-led regional order in Southeast Asia. Journal of Current Southeast Asian Affairs, 44(1), 148-173. https://doi.org/10.1177/18681034241294093

Navalny's Russia: When Dissent Becomes Betrayal

By Leontine Fischer

Vadim Stroykin, Vladimir Skhlyarov, and Pavel Antov all have one thing in common: cause of death–falling out of a window. While hardly the most common way to die, in Russia an unusual number of officials, businessmen, and public figures have met this fate after voicing criticism of the Kremlin. Though not all were confirmed as political killings, their frequency points to a climate where dissent is perilous. Alexei Navalny, a Russian lawyer, anti-corruption activist and challenger of Vladimir Putin, became the clearest symbol of how the government silences opposition and weaponizes division.

Since Putin's rise, Russia has steadily transformed from a managed democracy into "an especially repressive form of authoritarianism". Control of television and radio has ensured dissenting voices rarely reach wide audiences. Reporters Without Borders ranks Russia 171st out of 180 countries in press freedom, underscoring how tightly information is managed. Domestic media became "a consistent urveyor of conspiracy theories" focused on U.S. and EU plots against Russia, especially after the annexation of Crimea. The government reinforced this through law; NGOs and critics were branded "foreign agents", a Soviet-era term equating opposition with espionage. Online, troll farms amplified these messages, portraying Navalny as an extremist serving Western interests. In this climate, neutrality vanished, and citizens faced a stark binary: patriot or traitor.

Narrative control was never only about silencing critics. It also cultivated division as a survival tool. Authoritarian regimes thrive on enemies, and Navalny became one of Putin's most useful villains. "I'm like Lord Voldemort…he can't say my name out loud," Navalny remarked. His corruption exposés, including a viral documentary on Putin's alleged billion-dollar palace, directly challenged the Kremlin's legitimacy. In response, branded an "extremist", Navalny was equated with terrorists, deterring public support. Fear and polarization suppress collective action. As researcher Anna Kuleshova found, many Russians avoid protests not only because of detention, but also the threat of job loss, surveillance, or retaliation against their families. With opposition leaders "falling out of windows", people see little chance of success and stay silent. Division thus, becomes structural, allowing the regime to survive by isolating dissenters and uniting society against them.

Navalny nonetheless revealed cracks in the Kremlin's control by mobilizing young, urban Russians through digital activism. "It is natural to ask how a 44-year-old disbarred lawyer managed to become the emblem of oppositional politics… in a media environment dominated by Kremlin loyalists", one study noted. His YouTube channels turned investigative journalism into viral content, making participation as simple as liking and sharing videos. Yet this digital reach also showed its limits: older and rural populations often lack similar online access and remain more exposed to state television and propaganda. Internationally, Navalny became a Western symbol, reinforcing the Kremlin's narrative of "Russia vs. hostile outsiders." Internal and external divides feed each other, sustaining authoritarian resilience.

Navalny's story illustrates how division lies at the heart of Russia's political system. By turning him into both a villain and a symbol of Western meddling, the Kremlin reinforced a climate where dissent equates betrayal. Fear, propaganda, and generational divides discourage collective action, while the regime presents itself as the sole guarantor of stability against "traitors" and foreign enemies. In Russia's authoritarian system, division is not a weakness but a strategy of survival. Navalny's life–and death–exposed this strategy more clearly than anyone else.

Tussen orde en chaos: Provo als symbool van verdeeld Nederland

Door Summer Knegtmans

De jaren zestig kennen we allemaal als een decennium van protest, vooral onder de jonge generatie. Zo protesteerden jongeren tegen de oorlog in Vietnam, kwamen ze in conflict met het gezag, en wezen ze de tradities van hun ouders af. Nederland was hierbij geen uitzondering. Ook hier begon een jongere generatie zich te verzetten tegen de gevestigde politieke instellingen en traditionele waarden. Ze waren anders: rebels en vastbesloten om een nieuwe politieke stem te laten horen. In Amsterdam uitte deze spirit zich in een kleine anarchistische beweging genaamd Provo, die probeerde de gevestigde orde door elkaar te schudden en de kloof tussen de orde en de jonge generatie bloot te leggen.

De sfeer in Nederland was toen rustig en conservatief. De economie bloeide, de regering was stabiel en veel oudere burgers waren tevreden met de veiligheid en traditie van de wederopbouw na de Tweede Wereldoorlog. Jongeren vonden echter deze orde te beknellend. Waar hun ouders vrede en welvaart zagen, zagen zij gemakzucht en materialisme. Zo ontstond Provo als een politieke schokgolf.

Provo, opgericht in 1965, koos bewust voor confrontatie door middel van speelse maar ontwrichtende acties die de gevestigde orde belachelijk maakten. De Provo's protesteerden vaak op het Spui in Amsterdam. Ze ontwikkelden een nieuwe vorm van protestcultuur, met straattheater en muziek. Deze happenings stonden in contrast met de formele politiek van destijds, die totaal niet begreep hoe zulk gelach en spektakel politiek konden zijn. De Provo's gebruikten niet zomaar spot, maar als wapen. Door de politiek om te toveren in absurd theater, legden ze de werkelijke onzinnigheid van de machtsstructuren bloot. Het was dus een vorm van verzet.

Een van de beroemdste ideeën van Provo was het 'Witte Fietsenplan'. Provo stelde voor om in Amsterdam, waar het aantal auto's steeds meer toenam, gratis witgeschilderde fietsen neer te zetten. Het plan was zowel utopisch als praktisch: kritiek op de autocultuur en privébezit, maar ook een visie op duurzaam stadsvervoer dat toendertijd erg modern was. De gemeenteraad verwierp onmiddellijk het voorstel en de politie confisqueerde de eerste fietsen, maar het idee werd iconisch. Vandaag de dag kunnen fietsdeelsystemen over de hele wereld hun symbolische oorsprong terugvoeren op deze jeugdige daad van verzet.

Provo's meest dramatische confrontatie met de autoriteiten vond plaats in maart 1966, tijdens het huwelijk van prinses Beatrix en Claus von Amsberg. Toen de koninklijke koets door Amsterdam trok, gooiden Provo-activisten rookbommen, met als gevolg witgeslagen straten. Voor jongeren was het een spannend moment van verzet. Voor de autoriteiten een onvergeeflijke aanval op de nationale eenheid. Het harde politieoptreden hierna vergrootte het gevoel van verdeeldheid tussen jongeren en de staat. Beelden van politiegeweld tegen glimlachende, spottende demonstranten verspreidden zich snel, waardoor de beweging nog aantrekkelijker werd voor jongeren, maar beruchter onder de oudere generatie.

In 1967, twee jaar na haar oprichting, was de Provo-beweging uiteengevallen door interne spanningen. Maar ook omdat haar radicale ideeën werden overgenomen door de politiek. Toch had haar korte bestaan een blijvende impact: de Provo's inspireerden latere studentenbewegingen, feministische groeperingen zoals Dolle Mina en de kraakbeweging van de jaren zeventig. Bovenal bracht Provo een diepgewortelde generatiekloof aan het licht: waar de oudere generatie wanorde zag, zag de jongere generatie creativiteit en een kans om verandering teweeg te brengen.

How United is Germany Today, 35 Years after Reunification?

By Leo Gebauer

On November 9, 1989, the fall of the Berlin Wall not only marked the beginning of the end of the Cold War but also ended over 40 years of division within Germany.

After the official reunification on October 3, 1990, the former GDR was officially integrated into Germany. In this process, five new states were formed within Germany's system of federalism, commonly referred to as the "new states" (neue Bundesländer) today.

Despite this change, no new constitution was adopted (at least on a federal level; since states also have constitutions in Germany, technically five new constitutions were established on a state level). Rather, the "Basic Law" (Grundgesetz) from 1949 now serves as the constitution for all of Germany. Additionally, to foster development in the "new states", article 72 (2) was added, demanding "gleichwertige Lebensverhältnisse", or equal living conditions.

When we examine German history and describe east/west relations today, a question that keeps arising is: How united is Germany today, 35 years after reunification?

Several aspects stick out when we observe and compare contemporary eastern- and western Germany. 35 years after reunification, there are still distinct economic differences, differences in political ideology and, to some extent, diverging cultural identities.

When analyzing economic differences, we can see that wealth assets in eastern Germany are still about 50% lower compared to western Germany.

This can be partly explained by the GDR's socialist economic model, which made it difficult, or impossible, for individuals to accumulate and inherit wealth and real estate until 1990. Additionally, western Germany's role in the process of privatization has been criticized, partly because it enabled many west-German and foreign investors to buy previously state-owned companies. Furthermore, salaries in the "new states" are 17% lower today, though this divergence has decreased significantly over the past years. Recently, the most prominent example of divisions between eastern and western Germany have been electoral maps of Germany's 2025 election. These show a mostly "blue" east, representing a majority supporting the far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD), while the rest of the map is primarily "black", illustrating alignment with the Christian democrats (CDU/CSU).

While the AfD has also gained major increases in western states and recent polls have shown the AfD tied with the Christian Democrats (CDU/CSU) on a federal level, support has generally been higher in eastern states.

These voting patterns seem interesting, since people in eastern Germany used to vote more left-wing in the past. After the accession to western Germany in 1990, support for PDS (which was a successor party of Marxist-Leninist SED, the ruling party in the east until the fall of the Berlin Wall) was strong in eastern states. Later, Die Linke, which is the successor of PDS and still exists today, was a popular party in the "new states".

The results may not be surprising though when we look at levels of trust in democratic institutions in Germany based on where people live.

Statistics show that people living in eastern Germany generally have less trust in democratic institutions and less trust in democracy as a form of government, again highlighting eastern Germany's autocratic past and the difficulty of widely spreading democratic norms after 1990.

Another remnant from Germany's cold war history are diverging cultural identities in eastern and western Germany. Even today, identifying as "East-German" matters to many young people, highlighting how their parents' experiences and their social environment have had an impact on young people's feelings of belonging. Those experiences are often shaped by a feeling of being left behind and of not being seen as equals. While those negative experiences influence East-German identity, especially the young generation has also shown pride for being "eastern". Young people today can use that identity to point out inequalities without being seen primarily as victims.

While we can clearly observe economic, political and cultural differences between eastern and western Germany today, it is also important to highlight that eastern Germany has developed significantly since 1990, marked by decreasing rates of unemployment, increasing salaries and increasing rates of entrepreneurship.

How can Germany overcome these divisions and why is it so important?

Germans should finally view and treat east and west as equals, while respecting cultural differences. Many in east and west still carry an invisible wall in their minds, while a sense ofundervaluation and of being left behind persists among people in eastern Germany. So why not create a different, less antagonistic understanding of east/west relations altogether?

Facilitating change could include acknowledging economic strengths in the "new states", such as their ability to attract multinational companies. Or it could simply mean a changing rhetoric towards eastern German states that focuses more on similarities and less on differences. Also, a broader knowledge of history, that shows how both the economy and society were shaped by a communist dictatorship, could improve understanding. West Germany simply had 40 years more of capitalism and democracy which does not mean that people from the west are better, but that Germans need to work together to facilitate equal growth and to spread democratic norms. These measures could create a less marginalized view of people living in the eastern states, therefore helping their cultural identity lose its victim-narrative.

What is even more pressing today and what might be partly linked to peoples' feelings of being left behind and of not being heard by politicians, is the rise of the AfD, which is under observation of the intelligence service for suspected extremism and has been classified as 'right-wing extremist' in three eastern states.

Especially less prosperous, eastern counties show less trust in democratic institutions and more support for populist narratives, such as the AfD propagates. This shows both the necessity to actively improve trust in democracy and to battle inequality. Also, it highlights the need to spread and fight for democratic values.

Fighting populism may not be a solely German problem but highlights a movement all over Europe. Also, its root causes are more diverse and can be linked to a number of occurrences such as social media, infighting in the Government or globalization. Still, improving real and perceived divisions between eastern- and western Germany through addressing inequality and changing public rhetoric is an important starting point towards manifesting trust in democracy and therefore, challenging populism.

We will see if Germans can stand up united for their democracy.

Lokale politici en de impact van polarisatie

Door Carlinho Westerveld

Als eerste de vraag: wat doet u in de huidige politiek?

Kim: “Ik ben Kim Denie (27) en ben bijna afgestudeerd politicoloog. Naast mijn studie ben ik sinds 2022 raadslid in de gemeente Haarlemmermeer voor de PvdA. In mijn werk als raadslid probeer ik mijn uiterste best te doen om zo ver mogelijk weg te blijven van de wetenschappelijke materie die wij dagelijks bestuderen. Werkzaam zijn als politicoloog is een hele andere tak van sport dan daadwerkelijk politiek bedrijven in de arena. Desondanks brengt de kennis die ik op heb gedaan bij de studie wel een andere dimensie aan het politieke werk met zich mee.”

Dianne: “Twintig jaar geleden begon ik in de lokale politiek, toen ik de ChristenUnie naar Amstelveen haalde. In deze jaren ben ik altijd betrokken gebleven bij de stad en haar inwoners. Komende gemeenteraadsverkiezingen mag ik lijsttrekker zijn. Momenteel sta ik ook op de landelijke lijst van de ChristenUnie, op nummer 39. Het sociaal-christelijk denken helpt mij om ook lokaal thema’s te agenderen, richting te geven en op te staan voor het goede. Naast mijn politieke werk leid ik aan de Vrije Universiteit leraren maatschappijleer op, een onwijs waardevolle baan, zeker in tijden van maatschappelijk onbehagen en een groeiend lerarentekort. Op beide plekken probeer ik bij te dragen aan een democratische rechtsstaat waarin iedereen tot bloei mag komen.”

Hoe kijkt u aan tegen de polariserende ontwikkeling in de politiek?

Kim: “Ik maak me daar best wel heel erg zorgen om. Ik merk dat doordat polarisatie ontzettend gevoed wordt, dat het soms lastig is om een open gesprek aan te gaan. Mensen zijn zo zeker en overtuigd van hun standpunten dat ze soms ook niet meer vatbaar zijn voor wetenschappelijk bewezen feiten bijvoorbeeld.”

Dianne: “Polarisatie is niet per se verkeerd. Spanning is soms nodig voor verandering. Maar de vorm die we nu vaak zien, waarin mensen elkaar niet meer als gesprekspartner maar als bedreiging zien, vind ik verontrustend. We lijken verleerd om echt te luisteren, om onze mening even op te schorten. Ik was onlangs bij een bijeenkomst van Deel de Duif, waar mensen met Joodse en Islamitische achtergronden met elkaar in gesprek gingen. Wat me raakte, was hoe bevrijdend het is als iemand echt luistert zonder meteen een oordeel te vellen. Dat voelt kwetsbaar, maar ook menselijk.”

Denkt u dat de links-rechtsschaal nog relevant is in de politiek?

Kim: “Ik denk wel dat deze nog relevant is, maar ik vraag me af hoe lang dat nog zal zijn. Als je bijvoorbeeld Francis Fukuyama volgt, zou je kunnen stellen dat iedereen consensus heeft bereikt rondom de vrijmarkt en daarmee het liberale vrijheidsdenken. Kenmerkend voor links was natuurlijk ooit dat je juist dat vrijemarktprincipe afkeurt. Tegenwoordig zijn er veel nuances aan te brengen in politieke standpunten en uitingen. Ik denk ook dat iedereen een eigen opvatting heeft inmiddels over wat links en rechts zou zijn in tegenstelling tot wat daadwerkelijk links of rechts is volgens politicologen.”

Dianne: “Die schaal doet de werkelijkheid tekort. De samenleving laat zich niet vangen in één as. Ik snap de behoefte de werkelijkheid te vangen in schema’s en modellen. Iets sterker vind ik dan het hoefijzermodel en de welfare triangle, met hun aandacht voor de mate van activisme in de partijcultuur, of de balans tussen overheid, markt en samenleving. Sociaal-christelijk denken past daarin: vrijheid én verantwoordelijkheid, individu én gemeenschap. Links en rechts hebben elk waardevolle accenten, maar als we elkaar alleen nog in die termen zien, verliezen we de mens ertussen.”

In hoeverre denkt u dat media bijdragen aan de polarisatie?

Kim: “De media speelt een ontzettend grote rol. Dit komt ook doordat media eigenlijk niet gereguleerd is (wat ook absoluut niet zou moeten) en er daardoor ruimte ontstaat voor pseudo-journalistiek zonder gedegen feiten. Door algoritmes is het ontzettend moeilijk om daaruit te komen. Het verspreiden en tegengaan van nepnieuws is ontzettend belangrijk en hier ligt ook zeker een taak voor de landelijke politiek.

Dianne: “Media versterken tegenstellingen; conflict verkoopt beter dan nuance. Sociale media belonen verontwaardiging. Maar politici hebben daar ook een eigen verantwoordelijkheid in. De verleiding van het snelle frame is groot, maar het publieke gesprek vraagt juist om vertraging en verdieping.”

Merkt u dat polarisatie een grote rol speelt in de lokale politiek?

Kim: “Jazeker, we zien ook in de lokale politiek dat er verschillende partijen zijn die juist inzetten op xenofobie. Dit trekt landelijk natuurlijk kiezers, zoals we hebben gezien bij de afgelopen Tweede Kamerverkiezingen, dus hier lokaal op inzetten is een logisch gevolg. Uiteindelijk willen politieke partijen (en individuen, maar dat is een ander verhaal) macht. Dat verkrijg je alleen door invloed uit te oefenen en daarmee te vergroten. Als je verkiezingswinst behaalt en daarmee zetels vergaart, leidt dat automatisch tot het verkrijgen van meer macht.”

Dianne: “ In Amstelveen gaat het er gelukkig heel beschaafd aan toe. Als kleinste oppositiefractie worden we gezien en gehoord. De toon is mild en vriendelijk, de houding bijna altijd constructief. Dat waardeer ik enorm. Nu de verkiezingen dichterbij komen, merk ik wel dat de coalitiepartijen zich wat losser van elkaar positioneren en dat partijen zich duidelijker profileren; dat hoort ook bij de dynamiek van een verkiezingsjaar. Maar het blijft overwegend respectvol en dat is iets om zuinig op te zijn.”

Welke onderwerpen zorgen volgens u in de huidige politiek voor de meeste verdeeldheid in de samenleving?

Kim: “Migratie en asiel, geloofs- en levensovertuiging en de verdeling van welvaart en rijkdom.

Dianne: “Migratie, klimaat en bijvoorbeeld Midden-Oosten blijven de zichtbare breuklijnen, maar eronder ligt iets diepers: het verlies van verbinding en zingeving. Ik schrik van de cijfers over eenzaamheid en depressie. Ik dacht vroeger dat eenzaamheid vooral een kwestie van gezelschap was – dat het overging als er iemand langskwam. Inmiddels weet ik beter: juist het je inzetten voor een ander is de meest effectieve aanpak. Mensen zitten wonderlijk in elkaar. Zingeving is vaak de ontbrekende schakel.”

Wat denkt u dat de oplossingen zijn om de polarisatie in de huidige samenleving te verminderen?

Kim: “Ik denk dat het vergroten van mediawijsheid en inzet op onderwijs een hele belangrijke eerste stap zou zijn.”

Dianne: “Door opnieuw te leren luisteren. Niet om alles glad te strijken, maar om te begrijpen wat erachter zit. Marije van den Berg spreekt over het publieke gesprek terugbrengen naar de publieke ruimte – dat vind ik een prachtige oproep. Polarisatie is als vuur: ze kan licht geven of verteren. De kunst is om dat vuur te temmen — niet door het te doven, maar door er samen omheen te blijven zitten, met open oren en een warm hart.”

The Home Advantage:
Why Family Background Still Decides

By Emilia Mager

Educational inequality is a huge challenge in modern societies. The life chances of children are shaped by the parental education, whether they are raised in an academic household, where parents hold higher education degrees, or in a non-academic household. Research shows that the family background affects the academic achievements, social mobility and later occupational opportunities. Income and cultural capital have a huge impact and create achievement gaps between children, which are visible across all countries. This topic has attracted more attention in recent years as the social and economic divide grows, which has made education one of the strongest predictors of future success.

Where the Gap Begins

Achievement gaps are already forming, even before traditional schooling begins. Families with higher educational levels and incomes can invest in high-quality childcare and extracurricular activities, which translate to better cognitive and non-cognitive skills. By contrast, children coming from non-academic families often have fewer books and opportunities to develop early literacy skills as well as less exposure to complex language. A study in Norway shows that children coming from high-income households often outperform their peers who are coming from low-income families; the higher the class, the wider the gap. In addition, the research emphasises that the early years are a sensitive period that has a transferring influence on brain development and later learning outcomes, which depend on environmental stimulation. No matter how good the schools are, children who are already behind their peers often have difficulty catching up. Intervention must begin before primary education, with a focus on language exposure, parental engagement and access to preschool education, so that inequality decreases.

Education, Income, and Culture

The parental education shapes the cultural practices and the opportunities for children, as well as the income determines material resources. Pierre Bourdieu's concept of cultural capital shows that middle-class educated parents can transmit advantages through vocabulary, cultural participation and attitudes toward education. Studies are showing that children with higher levels of cultural capital - such as reading habits and cultural activities - often depend on the income of their parents. Academic households often provide a culture of language and strengthen the confidence that aligns with the expectations of schools. While non-academic households often value education, they often lack the cultural codes that are often assumed in schools. Further studies show that income and cultural capital can reinforce the educational gaps. Cultural capital can act as a hidden curriculum: it teaches children how to speak, behave and appear in a way that is rewarded by the education system. Often, teachers tend to unconsciously appreciate the cultural knowledge and linguistic styles of middle-class students by giving them an additional advantage in the classroom. This process has been repeated by generations, contributing to the reproduction of social inequalities.

How Schools Shape Opportunity

The educational system can shape the inequalities beyond the family backgrounds. School choice and private schooling tend to amplify the gaps between the children coming from academic families and non-academic ones. In contrast, curriculum standardisation and delayed tracking reduce inequalities by providing a more consistent learning environment. The opportunities of children are determined by dynamic interaction:

on the one hand, family resources and cultural practices and on the other hand, the institutional structure of school education. Separating children too early in school, depending on their academic performance, often reflects existing social hierarchies and not the individual potential of the children. School systems that maintain mixed-skilled classrooms tend to show a higher level of social mobility. In summary, the structure of the education system can either increase or decrease the effect of the family background on the opportunities for children.

Shaping Futures

Large achievement gaps are having lasting consequences. Differences in compulsory education have a direct impact on access to higher education and the resulting labour market results. Academic performances, the students' self-confidence and their ambitions are directly influenced by the cultural capital. All these factors shape long-term social mobility and immortalise the advantages of academic households and the disadvantages of non-academic households. Societies run the risk of becoming less mobile over time: the poor remain poor because their children do worse in school, while the children of the rich remain privileged. The consequences are often not only individual but also social: when potentials and talents are unevenly distributed, entire economies can lose productivity and innovation. This leads to a waste of human capital, as many children with a non-academic background often cannot fully develop their abilities and talents. This means that unequal opportunities often undermine trust in democratic institutions, as citizens perceive the political system as biased and unfair to privileged citizens.

Policy implications

Some studies suggest a multi-level political solution. Reducing income gaps through measures such as childcare, child benefits and early childhood education programs. Policies should focus on promoting parental engagement, access to cul tural activities and reading habits. In conclusion, there must be a change a the system level that de lays tracking and ensures the consistency of the curriculum, which can reduce the extent of opportunities, which depend on family background. These policies are successfully implemented in Finland's education system, which has kept achievement gaps among the smallest in the world. In addition, governments should focus on training teachers to recognise and challenge their own class and cultural background biases. Policies that support free tutoring as well as community libraries, and access to extracurricular programs have often proven effective in closing early learning gaps. However, these measures require continued political engagement because the benefits often occur after several years. Combating educational inequality is therefore not only a pedagogical challenge, but also a question of social justice and long-term economic sustainability.

The gap between academic and non-academic households continues to shape the educational outcome of children in all societies. Income still provides material resources, the education of parents and cultural capital conveys values, and language is rewarded in schools. The extent of these gaps varies from country to country and is influenced by both inequality and education systems. Ultimately, the alignment of opportunities requires action on three fronts: reducing economic inequality, eliminating cultural capital differences, and reforming education systems to be less stratified. Without these measures, the gap between academic and non-academic households will continue to exist for generations. In conclusion, it must be said that it takes more than one policy to close this gap. It requires an opportunity in social thinking that recognises education as a collective investment and not as a private privilege. To sum up, equal opportunity must start in early childhood. Only then can society put potential above privilege and build fair, cohesive democracies for the future.

Trapped in the Manosphere:
How social media shapes young boys today

By Ella Teague

Social media has become a pivotal part of Gen Z's lives, with over ninety percent of young people aged 13 to 17 in the Global North having access to at least one form of social media on a regular basis. However, due to social media's ever-expanding role in our everyday lives, the youngest generation has become plagued with the consequences of a largely unregulated system that has infiltrated and shaped Western society.

One prominent consequence on the younger generation is the influence of violent and extremist thoughts on girls, which has become accessible to all. Violence against women in the patriarchal society has been prevalent for centuries, and social media has become a tool that has allowed for the augmentation of influence of extremist violent subcultures, aimed at women. Notably, one powerful faction is that of the incel culture perpetuated in the manosphere. The manosphere, a term coined in 2009 is the online space which was originally created to support issues that men face in society, which now has become a forum expressing male hatred towards society. Specifically they target women who are allegedly the primary source of their problems. Common perpatrators such as Andrew Tate, utilise this space, influencing young boys on what a "young man should really be", and instilling the notion of saving Western society from 'too-far gone' feminism, by assuming the ' authoritative masculine' role in every nature of what they do, from fitness to relationships.

An evergrowing nuance within the manosphere, is 'incel culture': the culture where the absence of an individual's sexual life is due to the feminist reaction of societal power structures. Consequently, this has become the catalyst for influential extremist violent ideology, with several prominent factions. Renowned factions such as 'red pill', which is the starting faction, founded on the victimisation of men, and 'black pill' which is the pillar for the process of radicalisation, determining that the system is 'rigged against them', and utilises the feelings of hopelessness to encourage hatred towards women.

Recently, the discussion of the vulnerability of young people, particularly boys and incel culture within the manosphere has been pushed to the forefront due to the TV show, Adolescence,where a young boy kills a young girl due to her rejection and teasing. The Emmy award winning television show has been pivotal in highlighting the impact of social media and the vulnerability of young boys who are susceptible to being pulled into the extremist void of the manosphere, and the destructive impact that these extreme beliefs can have.

Nevertheless, powerful TV shows such as Adolescence are paramount in educating the older generations on the power of social media and the vulnerabilities that young people face, without adequate safeguards. It has led to significant discussions of the role of educators, parents and social media platforms, in what safeguards society can create to protect youth today.

However, many have highlighted the continual debate of freedom of speech as well as the role that Governments should play in citizens' private lives. The introduction of anti-misogyny lessons into the curriculum in the United Kingdom has been seen as a starting point, however, there is significant pressure for social media platforms and governments to establish more and stronger safeguards to protect young people today.

It is Shameful to Raise Concerns about the Safety of our Trains" - Foreshadowing Tragedy and Division

By Anna Maria Balaska

The 28th of February 2023 marked the start of an internal division in Greece, when passenger train IC-62 bound for Thessaloniki and largely filled with young students collided head-on with freight train 63503 in the Vale of Tempe. At exactly 23:18, Greece's deadliest rail tragedy claimed 57 lives, just days after then-transport minister Kostas Karamanlis insisted that "it is shameful to raise concerns about the safety of our trains" inside the Greek parliament. The 28th of February exposed the lack of state transparency, sowing doubt and distrust among Greeks, which grew as emerging evidence revealed the lack of rail modernisation.

The mismanagement of Greek railway systems dates back to the 2009-2010 economic crises, when rail systems were poorly maintained and personnel were insufficient or underqualified. Against this backdrop, the €41 million EU-funded Contract 717 was signed in 2014, aiming to modernize Greek railways and ensure passenger safety by the end of 2016. Nevertheless, only 32% was finished by 2017, when the Financial Audit Committee (EDEL) declared the project non-compliant with European standards and "froze" its implementation.

After "New Democracy" rose to power in 2019 and in cooperation with ERGOSE, the Hellenic Railway Organization's investment subsidiary, a supplementary contract was signed in 2021 to fully implement modern signalling and the European Train Control System (ETCS). Yet by the time of the February 2023 tragedy, signalling covered barely half of the Athens-Thessaly line, while ETCS on-board units were installed but not fully operational, unable to prevent the collision. For Greeks, these major gaps symbolized deep institutional neglect, turning technical issues into a national crisis of trust, which was further reinforced when the European Chief Prosecutor Laura Kovesi declared the Tempe tragedy unavoidable under such conditions.

Public outrage intensified when audio tapes surfaced two years after the tragedy, capturing the haunting phrase "I don't have oxygen" spoken just minutes before the IC-62 victims died from the flames ignited by unknown volatile hydrocarbons, whose presence contradicted the government's earlier narrative of "silicone oils" as the fire's source. In December 2024, a report by the General Chemical State Laboratory confirmed that the majority of victims did not die directly from the fireball, but from the deflagration of those hydrocarbons after the crash. These findings further eroded public trust and fueled nationwide protests on the 26th of January 2025, organized by the Tempe 2023 Accident Victims Association under the slogan "I don't have oxygen". A month later, on the tragedy's dark anniversary, nearly half a million people marched in Athens demanding the prime minister's resignation, amid global demonstrations and a nationwide strike. Today, the father of one of the young victims is on a hunger and thirst strike outside the Greek parliament, at the informal monument in front of the Unknown Soldier bearing the names of the 57 victims. His demand is the exhumation of his son's body and justice for the causes of the train collision, a call widely endorsed by Greeks.

The Tempe tragedy not only ignited nationwide anger and division between the public and the Greek leadership but also exposed persistent safety gaps in Greece's railway system, which have resulted from decades of governmental inaction. The state's role in the disaster, which was shown to far outweigh human error, intensified public mistrust and fuelled calls for justice that yet remain unfulfilled.

Taft vs Teddy: A Story of U.S. Intra-Party Division

By Laurens Goddijn

By June, 1912 had already been an interesting year. To name a few major happenings, in early January, the Chinese Qing dynasty was overthrown by Republican revolutionaries, deposing Emperor Puyi by February. Only two months later, in April, the 'unsinkable' RMS Titanic went under in the freezing Atlantic, and Barnsley won the FA Cup. Now, coming into June, the stage is set for another U.S. presidential election, in which the Republicans would be expected to prevail, given that they had only lost two presidential races since the Civil War, to the Democrat Grover Cleveland in 1882 and 1892. Since then, they had won three landslide victories in a row; seemingly, the only party that could stop them was their own.

The Republican Divide

June saw the start of the Republican primaries, followed by the Republican National Convention. The two strongest candidates for the Republican nomination were the incumbent president, William Howard Taft and former president Theodore 'Teddy' Roosevelt, who occupied the Oval Office from 1901 to 1909. These two candidates represented a split in the Republican party between conservatives and progressives that had been growing for over a decade. Taft represented the conservative wing of the party and was backed by the party leaders, who considered him a steadier option, as his counterpart was quite independent and in some ways relatively radical for the time. Therefore, it comes as no surprise that Roosevelt led the progressive wing of the party, advocating for things such as women's suffrage and the direct election of U.S senators. The fact that Roosevelt ran signalled a party divide in and of itself, as after his electoral victory in 1904, he immediately declared that he would not run for a third term, something which was still constitutionally possible at the time. Following his promise, he did not run for his third term in 1908, instead opting to groom and put forward his successor, the Secretary of War, William Howard Taft. Taft, who presented himself as a progressive, already caved to the conservatives in Congress during the first year of his term, signing a deeply unpopular tariff reform bill that antagonized the progressives. This continued throughout his term, while the progressives only increased in popularity. That and the failure to adhere to Roosevelt's desired policy direction culminated in the progressives hoisting Roosevelt into the saddle to try and dethrone Taft as the Republican nominee in 1912.

Primaries and RNC

To decide the Republican nomination, Taft and Roosevelt first competed in several primaries in only 13 of 48 different states; this was because in most states, the delegates were not allocated through direct primary elections, but either supported the position of the party leaders or had to be won over individually.

Roosevelt won 9 out of 13 primary elections; Taft's sole victory came in Roosevelt's home state of New York, where he triumphed dubiously. The controversy stemmed from the fact that nearly every electoral district in the state faced some circumstances, which made it very difficult to vote for Roosevelt, from 14-foot-long ballots to missing election officials. As a result, Taft won 83 seats in the state of New York compared to the 7 won by Roosevelt, who declared: "They are stealing the primary elections from us''. In the end, Roosevelt headed to the Republican National Convention (RNC) with 411 pledged delegates compared to Taft's 201. All other delegates were controlled by the party leaders, and as such, Taft still won the nomination. With Roosevelt and the majority of his delegates feeling cheated by the party establishment, they walked out of the RNC and founded the Progressive Party, also known as the "Bull Moose Party". Its name originates from a famous quote of Theodore ahead of his campaign, stating he was fit "as a Bull Moose," proclaiming his readiness.

The Laughing Third

The presidential election was quite a tumultuous affair, with Taft mostly campaigning to defeat Roosevelt in the election, while he, in turn, tried to steal progressive voters from Democratic nominee Woodrow Wilson with an emphasis on increasing the control the federal government had over business regulation, in an attempt to still win the presidency. The campaigning went on for four months, only briefly being halted by Roosevelt being shot in the chest on October 14th, which he reportedly survived because his folded 50-page speech slowed the bullet. After his release from the hospital, the campaigning resumed, but it soon became clear that Roosevelt could not win; their division cost the Republicans the election. The split in the Republican party meant that while combined they won 7.6 million voters, more than the 6.2 million Wilson received. But the Democratic vote being united meant that Wilson won 435 electoral votes, followed by Roosevelt with 88 and Taft with a mere 8. Wilson's win proved to be a slight victory for Republican progressives as well, as Wilson, who ran with a fairly progressive program, coined ''New Freedom", pledged to restore fairness of economic opportunity; this was to be achieved through expanded anti-trust and banking laws. While Wilson's election program was a bit more conservative compared to Roosevelt's, in the end, most of the latter's proposed economic policies were enacted by the Wilson administration. However, the result of their policies being implemented by Wilson was that the demand for a separate progressive party waned. This, paired with Roosevelt stepping down from active politics for good and disappointing mid-term elections in 1914, meant the end for the Progressive party as early as the 1916 elections.

Contemporary Relevance

This cautionary tale still holds relevance over a century later, as similar events have occurred in the last few US elections. For instance, in 2016, we saw a very heated democratic primary between Bernie Sanders and Hillary Clinton, with some in the party even claiming it had been rigged against him. Afterwards, Sanders distanced himself from these allegations and threw his full support behind Clinton, a justified decision given the example of 1912. The second instance of this election partially mirroring current events is the Republican split in 2024 between the MAGA movement and the more traditional republican base. In the end, it did not create an official split, as the traditional base did not have a very popular leadership figure to rally around, like the Progressives had with Roosevelt. However, it does once again show that intra-party splits in the U.S. still very much influence national politics. On the other hand, few things in history are ever repeated exactly as they happened before; for example, Barnsley are yet to win their second FA Cup.

Is France Really Secular?

By Celia Hiver

France prides itself on how strongly it implements its notion of secularism at every level of society: from school and public institutions up to the national state. This concept refers to the neutrality of the state towards religion, guaranteeing equality among citizens regarding beliefs, but also restricting the use of religious symbols in public. If you speak to the government, France is blind to religion: citizens are equal in front of the law without distinction of religion. In practice, is this really the case?

The concept of secularism was first introduced after the French Revolution in the late 18th century, marking a clear division from the absolutist monarchy. The process was implemented gradually, widening the division between the Church and state step by step, law by law. In the 1880s, education became secular, when religious instruction was replaced with moral and civic education, marking a very important step in the secularisation of the state. This persisted through the different republics France has undergone, and today, it still remains one of the main foundations of the modern state. Nevertheless, how does this concept apply in practice?

While in many other countries religious symbols are tolerated in all spaces, France banned these in public establishments, including schools. In 2023, a controversy arose when the Ministry of Education banned the wearing of abayas in public schools, arguing that they represent ostentatious religious symbols going against the principle of secularism in France. Many criticised this decision, as they considered abayas to be cultural elements instead of religious, and argued that it goes against the freedom of expression and religion in France. With this in mind, is France as secular as it portrays itself to be?

In reality, religion is the subject of major divides. Indeed, people interpret secularism in different ways. Some view it as a form of freedom of religion, meaning that citizens should be able to express their religion openly; therefore, religious symbols should be allowed openly. Others consider that any sign of religion should be hidden from the public eye, as they are an obstacle to the equal treatment of citizens in front of the law. These differences in perceptions make this debate even more complex. There are other layers to be added to this discussion. We should also look at how France's colonial past influences this debate: many French Muslims are descendants of migrants from the ex-colonies in North Africa. While France promises equal treatment of people, many of them still face issues with racism and discrimination. In this divide, religion is used as a tool: the far-right parties in France instrumentalise the concept of secularism, arguing that Muslim migrants are a threat to republican values. As such, even with the high emphasis of secularism, religion remains central to political debates in France.

Consequently, secularism is a very controversial topic in France. Even though the concept exists and it is being actively implemented, there are underlying issues that still persist, and are only creating further fragmentations in French society. Religion still creates grounds for divisions, regardless of secularism. How can France reconcile the principle of secularism with freedom of expression and identity? How can France claim its national identity while also accepting its colonial past? Can France fully reach its dream of a secular society and state, or should it change its approach?

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"While divisions certainly exist, they are also to be shaped by personal perceptions, the media and politics." (p. 4)

"Om deze kloof te dichten, is verandering nodig. Zo moeten politici meer luisteren naar de jonge generatie." (p. 5)

Education must be seen as a collective investment, not a private privilege." (p. 25)

"Sometimes leadership changes are not enough — but might this be an exception to the rule" (p. 7)

"We seem to have forgotten how to really listen — to suspend our judgment and hear what lies behind the words." (p. 22)

"Polarisatie is als vuur: ze kan licht geven of verteren." (p. 23)

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