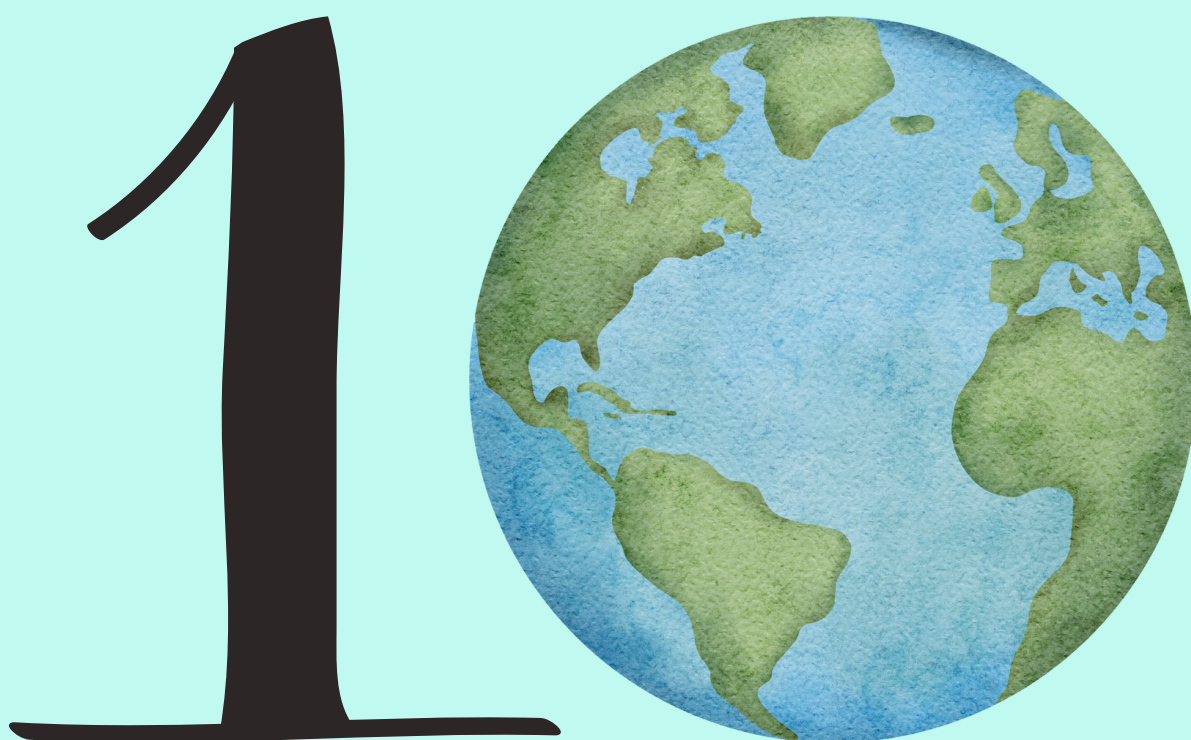




10 Year Anniversary Edition

*Looking Back to Move Forward:
the last 10 years as a window into the future*

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Foreword from the Editors-in-Chief

Image credit: Gustavo Basso via Flickr

It is no secret that the University of St Andrews boasts a long, storied history as an educational institution. Founded in 1413, the university has persisted through the greatest trials and triumphs of European history: from the Protestant Reformation to the Enlightenment era, through multiple world wars and the advent of modern technology.

Comparatively, *The St Andrews Economist* is still a sapling. Founded in 2015, our publication is only celebrating its first decade of existence this year; however, the past ten years have been monumental in their own way.

Special editions, social events, and the annual selection of new writers and editors – these defining features of *The St Andrews Economist* are seen as perennial aspects of the publication. Yet these features had to be created, and cultivated, by the past ten years of editors.

As Editors in Chief, we are always motivated to innovate further, to elaborate on these

traditions while preserving them for successive years of students. We are proud to have contributed to this process by establishing two new sections – Recently in Business and Recently in Politics – as well as a new role, Special Edition Editor. We are grateful to our website wizard, Daisy Finefrock, for her incredible work renovating our Wordpress domain. We hope that all our contributions will only strengthen the sapling that is *The St Andrews Economist*.

The success of our publication is not measured by its age or size, although these metrics are helpful to reflect on how much it has grown. Rather, people make the publication possible. For ten years, St Andrews students have decided to take on an extra assignment and contribute to this publication, whether by writing an article, editing a section, designing our logo, or even creating our name. These students, these people, are who best speak to the success of *The St Andrews Economist*.

For this reason, we are thrilled to have had former editors contribute to the 10th Anniversary Special Edition. You will read about how the publication was founded, from co-founder Adam Stromme, and hear thoughtful reflections on the lifetime of the publication, from former editor Alex Hayes. We would like to celebrate the achievements of former editors Ross Alexander Hutton and Brynna Boyer, who have gone on to study at the University of Cambridge and Oxford, respectively. Many other past Editors in Chief are also working in fields related to the passions they developed while working at the publication.

Over the next ten years, the success of *The St Andrews Economist* will hopefully grow even more. For everyone involved, writers and editors alike, the publication should continue to offer an important avenue for exploring academic interests and developing professional skills. The diversity of sections, and topics covered within them, is also essential for the publication to branch out beyond its Scottish roots.

In the age of information, written media is littered with cheap, biased, and misguided information; high-quality, student-produced material is a treasure we should all cherish. *The St Andrews Economist* remains committed to producing clear, formal, and relevant work that is written by students, for students and the world. We are proud that the publication has done so for a decade, and look forward to doing so for decades to come.

*-James Johnson, Lily Bolash and Giorgio Corrias,
Editors-in-Chief*



Editor's Note

Image credit: Gustavo Basso via Flickr

Ten years ago, *The St Andrews Economist* began, not with a grand launch, but with a question whispered over cardboard-flavoured coffee: ‘We don’t know how to get into the account.’ What followed wasn’t a continuation — it was a reinvention. With no archive and no roadmap, a team of students took a deep breath and built something new. This could be fun, they thought. And it was.

On the 10th anniversary of that leap of faith, we find ourselves once again at an inflection point — not just for this publication, but for the world.

The past decade has been one of upheaval and transformation. Brexit redrew political maps and redefined British identity. The COVID-19 pandemic shattered assumptions about global health and economics. Movements for racial and gender justice reshaped the public conversation. War returned to Europe.

Trust in international institutions wavered, and in boardrooms and bedrooms alike, artificial intelligence began to quietly rewrite the future of work, art, and human connection.

Each article in this Special Edition explores a major event or theme from the last ten years and then casts forward: What comes next?

We begin with our origin story — ‘This Could Be Fun’ — a nostalgic and candid recollection of the publication’s founding, followed by ‘Predicting the Unpredictable’, a reflection on the decade’s most defining global moments, from rail infrastructure to rising AI, and how unexpected change has become the new norm — also penned by a former Editor-in-Chief.

From there, we journey through the political and geopolitical shifts that reshaped alliances. ‘The Rise (and Fall?) of Polarisation in British Politics’ explores how Brexit sparked deep social divides that paradoxically helped revitalise centrism.

‘A Pivot to Europe?’ asks whether a post-Brexit Britain, disillusioned by shifting U.S. leadership, might find its future closer to Brussels than Washington.

Across the Atlantic, Marco, Polo dissects Secretary of State Marco Rubio’s political transformation in the Trump administration, illuminating the personal compromises behind grand foreign policy decisions.

Meanwhile, The US-China Trade War traces a decade of decoupling and outlines a fragmented economic future shaped by rival tech spheres, realigned supply chains, and the decline of dollar dominance.

In ‘The Challenges of Canada’s Armed Forces’, we see how recruitment crises, Arctic tensions, and defense procurement reflect broader uncertainties about Canada’s role in a changing NATO. In ‘How Will the Fall of USAID and DFID Shape International Development?’ we examine how Western retreat from aid has created space for China and Russia to recast global influence through infrastructure, coercion, and soft power.

Closer to home, ‘The Rise of the Far Right in Europe – A Gender Perspective’, shows how leaders like Le Pen, Meloni, and Weidel are remaking right-wing politics by weaponising and reframing femininity. ‘Human Trafficking in the Digital Age’ tackles how AI and cryptocurrency are transforming the mechanisms of exploitation — and whether technology might eventually help dismantle the networks it has enabled.

In ‘From Pledges to Reality’, we assess whether the Paris Agreement has done enough to curb climate catastrophe — and what must change for 1.5°C to remain within reach. ‘A Decade of Laudato Si’ revisits Pope Francis’s groundbreaking environmental encyclical, arguing that religious and ethical lenses may yet inspire political action where technical frameworks have stalled.

We close with a look forward. Our final article investigates how artificial intelligence is reshaping the creative industries. Will AI augment human ingenuity or automate it into irrelevance? Can artists, designers, and storytellers harness these tools without being eclipsed by them? In many ways, this question mirrors the challenge facing this generation — to adapt without losing ourselves.

There is also a thread of nostalgia here. Two of this edition’s authors are former Editors-in-Chief. They remind us not only of the big political moments that defined their tenures but also of the joy of building something meaningful with others — of learning together, arguing passionately, editing late, and imagining what the world could be.

Looking back, we see a decade that asked hard questions. Looking forward, we see a generation ready to answer them. *The Economist* once wrote that ‘the future is disorder.’ However, it is also opportunity. As this anniversary edition shows, if we meet it with thoughtfulness, courage, and a little curiosity, the next ten years might be even more worth writing about than the last.

Welcome to Looking Back to Move Forward.
—Isabella Checkley, *Special Editions Editor*



'THIS COULD BE FUN'

The St Andrews Economist Origin Story

By Adam Stromme, co-founder & former Editor-in-Chief

Ten years on, I remember it like it was yesterday. Over two cardboard-tasting coffees in the Main Library cafe, Joanna Kalemba, President of the Economics Society, leaned in and let the news slip in her crisp accent.

'We don't know how to get into the account.'

'So all the articles?'

She shrugged.

Suddenly the request to be Editor-in-Chief of the Economics Society publication took on a new light. This was not the carrying on of some legacy: this was starting from scratch. This was going to be a lot of work. Rather than be discouraged, I took a deep breath. I thought about it a little more. Once I did, the potential was almost overwhelming. I wasn't starting from scratch, I was starting anew. This could be fun.

And it would not just be me. I could think of many people who would love to help if I could phrase it just right. My academic father, Omar Ali, was a graphics whizz. He created the colour scheme and designed a logo. Devon Maloney, my girlfriend at the time, had web design experience and was an editor at her school newspaper. This meant we could mock up a new site, and the fledgling publication would have an experienced co-Editor-in-Chief. Coursemates' eyes would light up during class when I would lean over to get their take on some topic from our lectures. New writers.

New designs. New website. New writers. New, new, new.

And together, we started a process that turned The St Andrews Economist from a handful of editors and writers into a regular publication with commentary on global affairs that was varied in political orientation and creative in its angle.

Article releases were streamlined and topics broadened beyond the usual suspects of Anglo-American politics. Most satisfyingly, the paper also conducted interviews with top-notch global affairs thinkers, including developmental economist Ha-Joon Chang, environmental economist Tim Jackson, and feminist international relations heavyweight Cynthia Enloe.

To cap it all off, by the time the first cohort of writers graduated, The St Andrews Economist had its own line item in the Society budget, and released its first print edition, drawing in a new generation of writers. Paranoid about how the whole affair had started, I was something between dutiful and neurotic about ensuring a smooth handover before I left St Andrews – it looks like others have kept that enthusiasm going.

The first three years of The St Andrews Economist was a dizzying time to cover political change. In the United Kingdom, it was defined by fiscal austerity and its diverging responses. On the Left, it saw an attempt to push the Labour Party to abandon austerity under the leadership of Jeremy Corbyn. On the right, it witnessed the rise of UKIP and the fall of Cameron after the Brexit referendum. Globally, these opposing responses to the degeneration of neoliberalism are on full display to this day.

The St Andrews Economist was one of the fondest memories of my time at St Andrews, and the experience of starting it was formative

for me in the way that all great college intellectual endeavors are. Before you arrive at university, the motivation and skills required to truly probe into current affairs, and start something like a newspaper, is often lacking. After you graduate, life is often stingy with the time it gives you to pursue such passions. University is a sacred time to figure things out, personally and politically, at the cusp of full adulthood.

In addition to the value of the experience, the people who made up the publication have continued to be close friends well after graduating. I continue to be pen pals with Joanna Kalemba, and regularly catch up with other writers. And as luck would have it – for reasons above and beyond the many well-caffinated afternoons and late nights we spent editing articles and updating the website, but certainly not in spite of them – I ended up marrying the other Editor-in-Chief of The St Andrews Economist.

With The St Andrews Economist, as with so much else in life, the value of answering the moment, taking a deep breath, and starting something new shines forth: you might just have fun.

The views expressed in this article are the author's own and may not reflect the opinions of The St Andrews Economist.



PREDICTING THE UNPREDICTABLE

Politics, Progress and the Next Ten Years

By Alex Hayes, former Editor-in-Chief

The existence of the St Andrews Economist has coincided with a range of events that would have been difficult, if not impossible, to have predicted when the publication started ten years ago. The COVID-19 pandemic, insurrection at the United States Capitol Building, Russia's invasion of Ukraine, and the development of potentially groundbreaking artificial intelligence are just a few of these developments that have had far-reaching consequences.

Reflecting on my time at the St Andrews Economist, I reckon my most memorable article was '[Despite Political Challenges, Florida Rediscovered its Railway Heritage](#)'. In this piece I discussed Brightline, which is the only privately owned intercity passenger service in the US. It took a year from the publication of that article for services to begin running the short distance between West Palm Beach and Fort Lauderdale in January 2018, but by [September 2023](#) Brightline began running between Orlando and Miami.

Brightline has become a popular option for tourists and locals travelling along the east coast of Florida, as it has grown from an annual ridership of [579,000](#) passengers in 2018 to [2.8 million](#) passengers in 2024. However, Brightline has not been without its challenges, as the company lost [\\$493 million](#) in the first nine months of 2024 due to the costs associated with debt refinancing, expanding the line to Orlando and rising interest expenses.

These financial challenges have not stopped expansion plans for Brightline, as it announced new stations in the Florida cities of Stuart and Cocoa for 2028. Brightline's ambitions have taken the company to the West Coast, as Brightline West is a privately run high-speed rail route that will connect Las Vegas to Los Angeles in what the company [touts](#) to be the 'first true high-speed passenger rail system in the nation'. The Bipartisan Infrastructure Deal, signed into law by President Joe Biden in 2021, further cements the future of passenger rail

travel in the US. This legislation earmarks \$66 billion into the US rail system, the largest investment in passenger rail since Amtrak's creation in 1971.

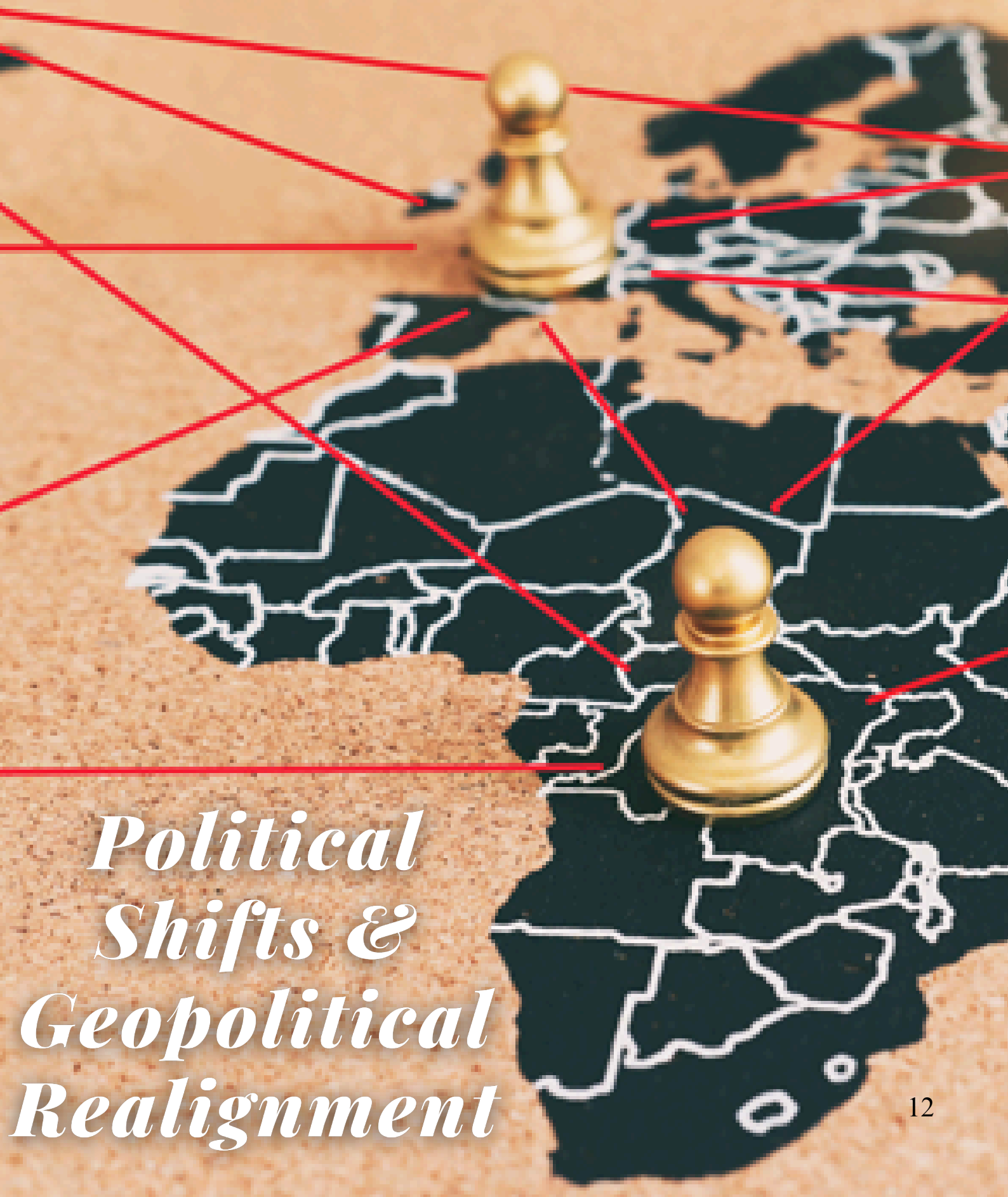
This is a case study of how much can change in ten years for an industry that has long been neglected in the US. While China and Europe continue to develop high-speed rail networks, the US has started investing in a mode of transportation that is more climate-friendly and safer than driving. The next ten years are sure to see more interest and investment in passenger rail, both in the US and globally. Nevertheless, as seen in the Brightline project in Florida, it will be the finances of such investments that will pose the biggest challenge to matching public expectations with finished projects.

Outside of rail travel, there are several other areas to look out for over the next decade around the world. Will there be progress towards a two-state solution between Israel and Palestine or will the consequences of the current conflict in the region push a resolution further out of reach?

Will the Irish reunification and Scottish independence movements secure referendums or will these campaigns remain pipe dreams? Will cryptocurrency become a more widely adopted component of the global financial system, or will investors continue to treat it as one of the riskiest asset classes? How seriously will the major global polluters deal with climate change, particularly in the US where such a clear division exists between the two major political parties on the matter?

If the last ten years have taught us anything, it is that the best way to forecast the preceding topics is to expect the unexpected. New, unprecedented developments across politics, financial markets and technology are likely to be covered in the twentieth-anniversary edition of the St Andrews Economist in 2035, but the inquisitive and analytical approach of the publication will continue to live on.

The views expressed in this article are the author's own and may not reflect the opinions of The St Andrews Economist.



Political Shifts & Geopolitical Realignment



THE RISE (AND FALL?) OF POLARISATION IN BRITISH POLITICS

By Tommy Thin

The direction of British politics has historically had a pendulum-like quality – power swinging steadily between Labour and the Conservatives every decade or so when the party in government inevitably loses cachet. However, while this two party system remains intact – just – the past ten years have seen a departure from other patterns, as party affiliation declines and polarisation rises. There has been increasing disillusionment amongst the British public with the major parties and a heightened disdain for those with opposing political views. While this shift is evident, what is less clear is whether it will endure or if it is necessarily detrimental to the civilised parliamentary democracy which has been a cornerstone of national identity for centuries.

Past Ten Years

Any attempt to chart the polarisation of

British politics must begin on 23 June 2016, when the Brexit referendum's infamous 52/48 split etched a stark dividing line through the heart of the British electorate. Fraught with misinformation and shady campaign tactics, the referendum forced voters to stake their claim vehemently to one side or another. More than just dividing the general public, sensationalist stories about immigration, hoards of vicious social media bots, and false claims about tax expenditure divided people on many levels. After the vote, many suggested they didn't know or wouldn't associate with those who voted differently to themselves. Since this turbulent moment, polarisation has bubbled to the surface in two forms – as 'issue polarisation' and 'affective polarisation'.

Primarily, evidence for issue polarisation has converged around immigration. That is to say, more than any other political topic, views on immigration have become drastically



Above Image credit: Colin McPherson / Alamy

divergent in recent years. Various demographic groups have separated from each other in opinion. The National Centre for Social Research has noted a divergence of views on immigration between generations, the Left and the Right, and those with and without higher education qualifications. Public perceptions have shaped policy-making as well, with initiatives like the Rwanda scheme emerging as desperate attempts to align with voters' strong, and often extreme, views.

‘Affective polarisation’ pertains more to identity and the social divisions between those with conflicting political views. In a similar vein, perhaps more than anything the past decade has been defined by the ‘culture wars’. The shadow of Brexit looms large over this kind of affective polarisation too. While 65% of those who voted Leave believe being born in Britain is a necessary part of being ‘truly British’, only 34% of Remainers agree. Similarly, 45% of Leave voters suggest efforts to support equal opportunities for ethnic minorities have gone far enough, compared to only 12% of Remainers. As a growing section of the British public believe the nation is in crisis and its values are being destroyed, parties such as Reform UK have emerged with inflammatory mission statements – apparently aiming to ‘stand up for British culture’ and ‘restore law and order’.

Brexit may have triggered the UK’s growing polarisation, but this divide has long outlasted the 2016 referendum. Today, political identity is often shaped by whether one does or does not fall into the category of ‘woke’. Consequently, more than half the country feel that Britain is more divided than it has ever been in their lifetime.

The Future of Polarised Politics in Britain

Inherently, this kind of extreme division seems at odds with the



Above: EDL march in London/ Oli Scarff/ Getty Images

democratic principles of civil discourse and pragmatic compromise. Yet, despite the troubling rise of extreme positions – particularly on the Right – these recent conflicts are not necessarily as severe or consequential as some suggest. While it can be tempting to declare doomsday, polarisation need not pull apart Britain’s parliamentary politics.

It would be overstepping the mark to suggest that its effects are neutral or

‘Brexit may have triggered the UK’s growing polarisation, but this divide has long outlasted the 2016 referendum.’

that it isn’t a generally negative force in society, but it is possible for polarisation to coexist with healthy democracy. Indeed, conflict is a necessary aspect of discourse in any modern democracy, and, in some sense, polarisation represents heightened participation in that discourse rather than its breakdown. One study from the London School of Economics notes that as British

politics has become increasingly divisive, it has also become increasingly engaging, with voter turnout and activities like protesting also on the rise. Perhaps unexpectedly, the more antagonistic the nation’s politics becomes, the more representative elections and discourse become as greater numbers make their voices heard.

More importantly though, it is essential to note that growing antagonism between the Left and the Right has not entailed a dissolution of the centre-ground. On the contrary, despite all the talk of bitter divides, recent years have arguably been a golden age for British centrism. In June 2024, Keir Starmer won the third largest one-party majority in history with a distinctly centrist manifesto, promising not to cut taxes but to deliver economic stability and better welfare.

Moreover, a strong cultural appetite for centrism seems to undermine the notion of ideological battles over ‘woke’. For instance, it’s easy to be glib about the rise of podcasting as an



Image credit: PA/ Sky News

oversaturated media trend, but the surging cult following of shows like *The Rest Is Politics* suggests a widespread desire for moderate and civil political discourse. Clearly, the polarisation generated in 2016 has not obliterated the middle-ground either at the ballot box or on Spotify.

Ultimately, conflict sells, and as long as it continues to sell, the media – both of the Left and the Right – will continue to fuel the narrative of a cut-throat culture war and deep divides in the British political system. Of course, these media tactics are nothing new, but the events of 2016 and the drawn-out debates which followed provided the perfect conditions for turning political strife into profitable news. Discourse in the post-Brexit era has been dominated by loud minorities who sit on the fringes of the political spectrum, trying to smear those on the other side.

Anticipating the years to come, any political analyst would be much better served looking at the silent majority who sit much more contentedly in the middle-ground, electing centrist governments and dictating moderate policy. The past ten years may have been a turbulent decade of dicey conflict, but perhaps it has posed minimal threat to a democracy as old and resilient as Britain's. In the decade to come, the power of civil parliamentary democracy will no doubt endure.

The views expressed in this article are the author's own and may not reflect the opinions of The St Andrews Economist.



Above: Alastair Campbell and Rory Stewart, hosts of 'The Rest is Politics' podcast. Image credit: Peter Tarry/ Times Media LTD



Image Credit: Socialist Worker/ Peoples Dispatch



A PIVOT TO EUROPE?

How Britain's new Special Relationship may lie closer to home

By Tom Fort

May 2025 will mark ten years since the UK's 2015 General Election, when David Cameron's Conservative Party made it over the electoral finishing line of 326 seats – just – to deliver the first Conservative majority since 1992. Acutely aware of a swelling of support for the United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP), the Conservative manifesto notably included a commitment to a referendum on the country's membership within the European Union, due to be held in June of the following year. Thus, the stage was set for 13 months of political campaigning which would ultimately result in Britain's withdrawal from the EU, Cameron's resignation, and a widening of the English Channel into more of an English Gulf, across which governments wrangled over the details of the future British-European relationship. Recent political events and a closer alignment of geopolitical aims have,

however, slowly begun to breach the divide, setting a new stage for the next ten years.

The Labour Party's victory in the 2024 General Election seemed to provide an opportunity for the UK to recalibrate its relationship with the EU. Indeed, Prime Minister Keir Starmer stated how his government would aim to repair British-European relations not only in trading terms, but in the establishment of a new, broad security architecture.



Image credit: Phil Noble, Pool Photo/ AP File

Since Labour's election victory, however, it had seemed for a long time that the cordiality of Britain's dialogue with the EU was not matched in policy. The government rejected, for example, a recent scheme with the EU on youth mobility visas and a call by Ed Davey, leader of the Liberal Democrats, for Britain to rejoin the European customs union was also dismissed.

The seeming anxiety of the Labour government to engage with closer relations with the EU may partly be explained by the results of the 2024 election. A landslide victory for Labour in the House of Commons was not matched by a similar surge of votes on the day. Indeed, Labour's vote share of barely one third, 33.7% to be exact, made Starmer's administration considerably less popular than the May and Johnson Conservative governments elected in 2017 and 2019 respectively. The 2024 swelling of support for Reform UK in traditional Labour heartlands may, conversely, explain Labour's defensive European strategy.

Recent months however have upended decades of geopolitical understanding. Since his re-election in November 2024, Trump's administration has overseen a significant realignment of American foreign policy, one which, as some observers put it, represents the termination of the eighty-year-long post-war network of alliances between Europe and the United States. While the ramifications of this move are constantly evolving, the United States' embracing of the Russian state's narrative surrounding the Ukraine War, its trade wars against some of its largest export markets, and alienation of Europe through territorial ambitions and insults towards

historical support for the United States, are forcing allies to reconsider Washington's ally status.

Within this widening chasm lies the UK, no longer a member of the European Union and itself a target of attack from the second Trump administration, albeit so far to a lesser extent than perhaps other members of the Western alliance such as Canada or the EU. The extent to which this hangs on a shiny royal invitation for a state visit, or Trump's supposed fondness towards the UK, remains to be seen. While the UK has so far walked this diplomatic tightrope, the threat to NATO unity and tariff regimes against some of the UK's largest trading partners, threatened or implemented, may force the UK to reassess its position.

The impetus of this new geopolitical reality is accompanied by evolving public opinion in the UK, which in recent years has both soured on its view of Brexit and softened on its attitudes towards Britain's relationship with the EU. According to a poll taken by YouGov in 2025, 55% of surveyed British citizens believed that Britain's withdrawal from the EU was a mistake, while only 30% remained supportive of the decision to leave. The figure of 30% represents a historical low point in support for Brexit according to YouGov data collected since 2017, which also reveals that the gap between public support and opposition has been widening steadily since May 2021.



Image credit: Benjamin Dremel/ AP

Owing to the pace of change and volatility of transatlantic relations, moreover, this polling data does not account for any current shifting or reactionary public opinion as the political climate continues to evolve. In this context, both domestically and internationally, the stage may be set for the cultivation of a rejuvenated and tighter relationship between Britain and the EU over the next ten years.

This future relationship is by no means binary. It exists along a spectrum, and at the furthest end from Britain's current position could stand a rejoining of the bloc, its single market and customs union, but it remains to be seen just how far Britain would be willing to slide. The Trump administration has, by contrast, fulfilled its rhetoric with action. Washington's suspension of military aid and intelligence sharing with Kyiv, its voting at the United Nations to reject Russian aggression and proposed annexation of a NATO ally, has made European defence within Britain's own best interest. Certain actions have more directly affected the UK, such as Washington's decision to

to prevent British intelligence gathered alongside US forces to be passed to Ukraine. That Washington's suspension of critical intelligence was closely followed by a Russian bombardment of Ukrainian cities, described by Trump simply as 'what anybody would do', lays bare the gravity of both American actions and the realignment of American-European relations.

As of March 2025, the aim of the UK government does not seem to be Britain's re-entry into the customs union or single market, but rather a closer economic relationship. Within this context, EU member states have expressed a willingness for greater economic co-operation with the UK, with Irish Taoiseach Micheál Martin expressing Ireland's willingness to assist the UK in its 'resetting' of relations with the EU. Whether the UK would be welcomed back into the EU as a full member is up for debate. It is possible that many of the issues which made Britain a 'problematic' member state may discourage its readmittance.

For example, London's historical



Image credit: Sky News

desire for a looser relationship, were it to be repeated, may provide populist political parties across Europe with a clear example of how their own demands could succeed. A state enjoying the benefits of membership while being able to resist certain regulations may provide the impetus for such parties to readjust or challenge their own countries' standings within the EU, thus potentially weakening the union's ability to act as a coherent unit.

This could be especially relevant over the next ten years, considering the rise of populist parties in recent European elections, such as with Germany's Alternative für Deutschland finishing as the second-largest party in the 2025 Federal Election. British membership, therefore, may be too great a risk for more centrist European governments attempting to deter any rise in support within their own borders.

The possibility of a closer economic relationship exists alongside a growing support for closer military cooperation. Germany's likely next chancellor, Friedrich Merz, has already expressed a willingness to enter into dialogue with both the UK and France regarding an extension of their nuclear protection. The French and British militaries have both declared their intention to establish their own military presence as part of peacekeeping operations in Ukraine's immediate and long-term future. British and European policy has been aligned through common increases in defence spending. The UK has already committed to spending at least 2.5% of GDP on defence and the EU has proposed a new defence spending package worth €800 billion.

Moreover, Germany has moved to

to undo the state's constitutional limits on borrowing, loosening a significant financial straitjacket which will enable greater defence spending. Taking these factors into account, the UK and its EU partners may inevitably find even more common ground.

In conclusion, the next ten years may prove to be pivotal in the evolution of the UK-EU partnership. While Washington will likely remain a key partner, the UK may instead begin to find broader support for its ideas across the Channel. Although political risk may hold the UK back from wholly restoring its former relationship with the EU, current geopolitical changes may be setting the stage for a closer economic and military relationship over the next decade.

Moreover, it is also possible that over this time, the UK's relationship with individual EU member states may evolve further alongside Britain's relation with the bloc. Thus, while close relations with Europe seem probable, close relations with the European Union itself may follow a different trajectory, reflective of any potential trepidation which may exist on either side. Young British people have, however, proven themselves to be remarkably pro-European according to research. One poll taken before Trump's re-election placed support for re-joining the EU at 84% among British adults aged 18-25, the new political generation who did not have the chance to vote in the 2016 referendum. Therefore, even if ten years may not sufficiently change the UK's political landscape, the demographic and political seeds may be being sewn for a British European reintegration beyond this time frame.

The views expressed in this article are the author's own and may not reflect the opinions of The St Andrews Economist.



Image credit: The White House via Twitter



MARCO, POLO: WHERE HAVE SECRETARY RUBIO'S VALUES GONE?

By Lily Bolash

The world of comedy is infamous for its brazen portrayal of political figures. Saturday Night Live (SNL), a New York-based late night show, is particularly renowned for its irreverent coverage of the Trump administration. In the current season, comedian Marcello Hernandez plays a particularly disconcerting parody of Secretary of State Marco Rubio; this character was central to the opening scene of Episode 14, which features a satirical depiction of the disastrous Oval Office meeting between President Trump, Vice President Vance, and President Zelenskyy of Ukraine.

Though exaggerated, Hernandez's acting in this scene underscores the disappointing lack of integrity that characterises Secretary Rubio's contribution to the presidential cabinet.

Hot and Cold

By accepting a top role within the administration, Secretary Rubio appears to have warmed up considerably to the president. During the campaign to become the Republican Party nominee for president in 2016, Rubio labelled Trump a 'con artist.' Since, his opinion has shifted dramatically, with Rubio



Image credit: Joe Raedle/Getty Images

now claiming that '[Americans] have a president with moral clarity in Donald J. Trump.'

The president also appears to have mended fences with his former opponent. In a social media post on November 10, 2015, @realDonaldTrump called Rubio a 'lightweight choker' for his stance on immigration. By contrast, in an address to Congress on March 4, 2025, the president remarked that Rubio 'has been amazing' and '[is] going to do a great job' as Secretary of State. However, the president could not resist following this praise with a gentle warning: 'Good luck Marco. Now we know who to blame if anything goes wrong.' He also joked

about being 'very, very happy' or 'very concerned about Rubio's historically unanimous Senate confirmation – clearly, spring mending-time is not yet complete between these neighbours.

Nevertheless, the political truce between Trump and Rubio is unsurprising: the party of Lincoln has morphed into the party of Trump, and making an enemy of his party leader would have only stunted Rubio's career as a Republican. In any case, he would not have secured the coveted role of Secretary of State without a shift in his public opinion of Trump.

War on 'Woke'

As the 72nd Secretary, Rubio has emphasised his ‘priority’ to put ‘America first’ through the work of the State Department. So far, this agenda has eliminated the Office of Global Women’s Issues, the Office of Diversity and Inclusion, the Office of Global Criminal Justice, and evaluated the closure of several embassies and consulates worldwide. For summer 2025, the Student Internship Program was also terminated; this program provided paid work experience for young citizens interested in a foreign service career.

Most administrations make slight adjustments to the structures of American diplomacy. Secretary Rubio’s efforts, however, are part of a wider effort to reduce the nation’s commitments in certain issue areas and, allegedly, improve efficiency in the federal government. For Elon Musk, the leader of this reactionary effort, cuts to the State Department could not happen fast enough at the start of the administration:

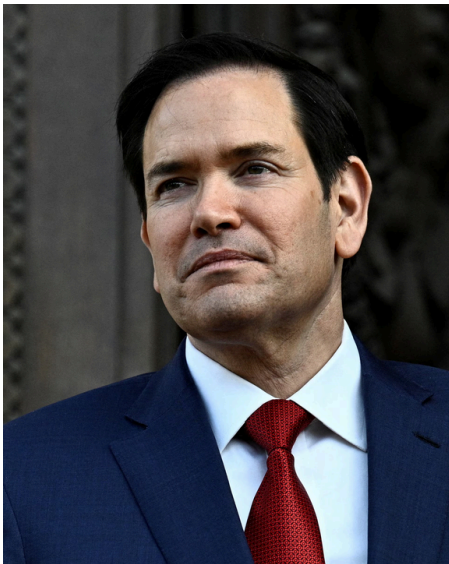


Image credit: Julien De Rosa/ Pool via Reuters/ File photo

the billionaire’s micro-management of federal affairs caused notable tension with Rubio and other members of the cabinet.

Whether or not Rubio enjoys working with Musk is a personal issue alone. While interesting to citizens of the United States, it is certainly proving to be an unwelcome distraction to the people of Ukraine, many of whom are actively suffering under Russian occupation. For this embattled state, Secretary Rubio is an essential figure in the appeal for solidarity from its Northern Atlantic allies.

Honest Rubio

In January 2025, Secretary Rubio claimed that a ‘dishonesty’ exists within this base of support for Ukraine. In his words, the allies have been wrong ‘to believe that Ukraine would be able, not just to defeat Russia, but...push [Putin] all the way back to what the world looked like in 2012 or 2014 before the Russians took Crimea.’

These statements play into a growing, fallacious narrative about why the United States ought to cease economic and military support for Ukraine. According to subscribers of this narrative, why should the United States continue to help Ukraine in battle, if Ukraine was never going to defeat Russia in the first place?

Such circular reasoning informs the Trump administration’s cavalier attitude towards brokering a peace between Ukraine, and Russia. In April 2025, Rubio warned that the United States is ‘not going to continue with this endeavour for weeks and months on end,’ echoing the impatience and frustration of his Commander in Chief. According to European officials, the Trump administration’s contribution to that endeavour was a ceasefire plan that requires Ukraine to recognise Crimea as a Russian territory and concede any possibility of joining the Northern Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO).



Image credit: Eyan Bucci/ The AP

These demands are anathema to President Zelenskyy. Repeatedly, the Ukrainian president has stated that the territorial sovereignty of his country is not on the negotiating table. For Zelenskyy, officially ceding Crimea to the Kremlin would be an 'unconscionable' act that crosses a 'red line...for Ukrainians.' Though the Trump team is determined to portray Mr Zelenskyy as a stubborn and disagreeable negotiator, he is simply determined to preserve the constitution of his country, just as any honorable president ought to.

Throughout the negotiation process, Secretary Rubio has spoken frankly about President Trump's opinions and objectives. For the Make America Great Again (MAGA) voter base, this 'common sense' approach is extremely popular. However, embracing the administration's supercilious posture towards brokering peace in the region

is a complete reversal of Mr Rubio's personal beliefs about Russia, Ukraine, and the role of the United States in the war.

'Wakey-wakey,' Mr. Secretary

As a Senator from Florida, Rubio was initially a strong opponent of the Russian presence in Ukraine. His views were rooted in the political principle of the situation: 'We cannot return to a world in which countries can simply choose to invade their neighbors,' he asserted prior to the full-scale invasion in February 2022.

In 2014, an even younger Senator Rubio spoke passionately about the responsibility of the United States to resist Russian aggression and protect Ukraine from violations of international law. This speech was made in defence of the Ukraine Aid Bill, a piece of legislation to assist the Ukrainian government after the



Image credit: Mark Felix/ AFP via Getty Images

annexation of Crimea by Russia; in his comments, Rubio implored his colleagues to set their political disagreements aside and vote in favour of the bill in order to send a strong message of support from the United States Congress.



Above: Meeting between President Zelenskyy and President Trump, Secretary Rubio, and Vice President Vance at the Oval Office in February 2025. Image credit: CNN Politics

There is a stark contrast between this Senator and the Secretary who sat in the Oval Office during the condescending exchange between Trump, Vance, and Zelenskyy. Slouched on the couch as a passive participant, one could almost forget that Rubio was present in the room while Vance demanded a 'thank-you' from the president of Ukraine.

On SNL, comedian Marcello Hernandez parodies this scene by staring blankly into the camera while his co-stars reenact the jaw-dropping diplomatic squabble. This performance is a striking metaphor

for Secretary Rubio's detached attitude towards the crisis. In recent years, Rubio has advocated for negotiating a settlement to the war; however, his fundamental concern for the fate of Ukraine and the principles at stake – which he clearly orated in 2014 – is now remarkably absent from his work in the Trump administration. The former champion of Ukrainian sovereignty seems to have lost his integrity somewhere between Capitol Hill and the Harry S Truman building.

Hunting for integrity

The outcome of a Trump-brokered deal for Eastern Europe remains to be seen. It is possible that the administration will truly 'take a pass' on negotiating an agreement between Ukraine and Russia. In lieu of meaningful diplomacy, President Trump may continue to post compelling statements on Truth Social. If the likes of 'Vladimir, STOP,' don't deter the Kremlin, the Ukrainian army will be forced to rely on European support alone.

As chief diplomat of the United States, the result of this peace process will ultimately be reflected in the historical



Above: Rubio and Trump during the Republican debate held at the University of Houston In February 2016. Image credit: Gary Coronado/AP

record of President Trump. Should the outcome be negative, the legacy of Secretary Rubio will be collateral damage: his historic, unanimous Senate confirmation was a testament of his former colleagues' respect and trust. For years, Mr Rubio has defined himself as a reliable and rational voice on foreign affairs – both values, it seems, have been swept under the rug of crude bartering and appeasement to the Russian government.

Secretary Rubio is an accessory to the clumsy, transactional diplomacy exhibited in the Oval Office by President Trump and Vice President Vance. This approach is allowing the fate of Ukraine to be disregarded in an unprecedented way. In contributing to the belittling and betrayal of an American ally, Rubio is compromising his integrity and undermining the integrity of his office. His actions will define not only his own legacy, but the legacy and function of the State Department in future conflicts.

Four years of service to this Department lie ahead for Rubio. In addition to restructuring plans, his role as Secretary of State will require him to travel around the world; for the sake of American allies and citizens alike, it can only be hoped that he finds his lost values somewhere around the globe.

The views expressed in this article are the author's own and may not reflect the opinions of The St Andrews Economist.



THE US-CHINA TRADE WAR AND THE FUTURE OF GLOBAL ECONOMIC FRAGMENTATION

By Oberon Theam

The past decade has witnessed a profound shift in global economic dynamics, largely shaped by the intensifying rivalry between the United States and China. What began in 2018 as a series of tariffs under the Trump administration, initially imposing 25% duties on \$34 billion worth of Chinese imports, quickly escalated into a full-scale trade war. By 2020, the U.S. had levied tariffs on over \$550 billion in Chinese goods, prompting retaliatory measures from Beijing on \$185 billion worth of American exports. Furthermore, tensions between the two nations escalated beyond trade, extending into investment restrictions, financial decoupling, and a fierce technological rivalry. For example, China's 'Made in China 2025' initiative, aimed at achieving global leadership in high-tech industries, further fueled US concerns, prompting Washington to intensify scrutiny of

Chinese firms like Huawei and TikTok.

As a result, the economic fallout has been significant. By 2023, U.S.-China trade fell by 11.2% year-over-year, while global supply chains fractured as companies sought to reduce reliance on Chinese manufacturing. This dynamic has sparked a resurgence of economic nationalism and a realignment of global alliances. If these shifts are to deepen in the coming decade, the consequences would lead to further fragmentation with lasting impacts on global trade, capital flows, and economic policymaking. Ultimately, to forge a more stable and cooperative global economic order, nations and policymakers must reassess their current approach. A critical examination of the origins, key developments, and consequences of the U.S.-China trade war offers essential insights into the future of economic globalisation and the



Image credit: Reuters/ Kevin Lamarque/ File Photo
evolving balance of geopolitical power.

Looking Back

The U.S.-China trade war was not an isolated incident, but rather the culmination of decades of escalating economic tensions, driven by profound structural imbalances, shifting global power dynamics, and intensifying geopolitical rivalries between the two largest economies in the world. Trade deficits, intellectual property concerns, and divergent political and economic systems, have fueled a growing sense of competition and distrust between the

U.S. and China. Since China's accession to the World Trade Organization (WTO) in 2001, its rapid economic rise has been fueled by an aggressive export-led growth strategy, extensive state subsidies, and technological advancements. Between 2001 and 2017, China's share of global manufacturing output surged from 7% to nearly 27%, while the U.S. manufacturing sector shed more than 5 million jobs. Additionally, the U.S. trade deficit with China ballooned to \$375 billion by 2017, driven largely by American reliance on Chinese-made electronics, machinery, and consumer goods. As a result of the decline of manufacturing, continually ballooning trade deficit, and escalating concerns over intellectual property theft – estimated by the U.S. Trade Representative to cost American firms between \$225 –600 billion annually – the Trump administration implemented a series of tariffs in 2018, citing both unfair trade practices and national security risks as the primary motivations.

By mid-2018, the U.S. imposed tariffs on \$250 billion worth of Chinese imports, including steel, aluminum, and high-tech components. China retaliated with tariffs on \$110 billion in U.S. goods, particularly targeting industries with strong political influence, such as agriculture and manufacturing. However, in January 2020, after nearly two years of escalating tensions, the U.S. and China signed the Phase One trade deal, in which China pledged to purchase an

additional \$200 billion in U.S. goods and services over two years. However, by the end of 2021, China had only fulfilled about 58% of its purchase commitments. More critically, the agreement failed to address structural issues such as state subsidies, forced technology transfers, and intellectual property protection—core concerns that initially sparked the trade war.

After the 2020 U.S. election, the incoming Biden administration

‘This fragmentation [...] has led to a major trend of the formation of competing economic blocs.’

largely upheld the hardline stance on China, shifting focus toward multilateral strategies to counter Beijing's economic and geopolitical dominance. In 2022 they launched the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework (IPEF), aiming to promote resilient supply chains, clean energy investments, and digital trade, while reducing reliance on China. Additionally, the signing of the CHIPS

and Science Act, earmarked \$52 billion to boost domestic semiconductor production and reduce dependence on Chinese and Taiwanese chip supplies. The Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) further imposed restrictions on electric vehicle (EV) supply chains, requiring that key battery materials be sourced from the U.S. or allied nations, effectively sidelining China's dominance in the EV sector.

Moving Forward

The U.S.-China trade war has triggered a new era of global economic fragmentation, one that will have lasting consequences on international trade, investment flows, and technological development over the next decade. In addition, this fragmentation – driven by deepening geopolitical rivalries, technological divides, and the increasing focus on economic resilience – has led to a major trend of the formation of competing economic blocs, with the world increasingly divided into two spheres of influence: one led by the U.S. and its allies, and the other by around China.



Image credit: Jonathan Ernst/ Reuters

This economic bifurcation is already apparent. The U.S.-led bloc, which includes key partners such as Japan, South Korea, India, and the European Union, is prioritising supply chain security, clean energy development, and the preservation of technological leadership. The Indo-Pacific Economic Framework for Prosperity (IPEF), launched in 2022 with 14 participating countries, seeks to enhance economic cooperation across the Indo-Pacific region, while the CHIPS and Science Act allocates \$52 billion to strengthen domestic semiconductor production and reduce dependence on China.

On the other hand, China has focused on solidifying its economic alliances through the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP). The BRI, which spans over 140 countries, has fueled infrastructure investments across Asia, Africa, and Latin America, expanding China's economic influence in emerging markets. Meanwhile, the RCEP, which took effect in 2022, has become the world's largest trade agreement, accounting for nearly 30% of global GDP and positioning China as the centerpiece of a vast regional trade network.

Furthermore, the recent expansion of BRICS, now including Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Egypt, Iran, Ethiopia, and Argentina, signals the rise of a multipolar economic order that increasingly challenges Western-dominated financial institutions. This ongoing fragmentation underscores the shifting global order, where nations are forced to navigate the complexities of competing economic and political alliances while seeking to preserve their economic interests in an increasingly divided world.

Technological Decoupling: The Race for Innovation Supremacy

One of the major battlegrounds of the

next decade will likely be technology, particularly semiconductors, artificial intelligence (AI), and green technologies. In recent years, the U.S. has doubled down on efforts to maintain its leadership in semiconductor manufacturing, with Intel, Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Company (TSMC), and Samsung collectively investing over \$100 billion in new fabrication plants across America. Additionally, government mandated export controls imposed in both Trump and Biden Administrations have restricted China's access to advanced semiconductor manufacturing tools, severely hampering its ability to produce cutting-edge chips.

Despite these setbacks, China is ramping up its push for self-sufficiency, with Beijing allocating more than \$150 billion toward developing its semiconductor industry. Companies such as SMIC (Semiconductor Manufacturing International Corporation) and Huawei's HiSilicon are actively pursuing breakthroughs in chip design and fabrication, with the latter unveiling a 7-nanometer chip in 2023, signaling progress despite U.S. restrictions. China is also leading in AI adoption, with firms like DeepSeek, Baidu, Tencent, and Alibaba integrating AI-driven solutions into finance, healthcare, and manufacturing. While the U.S. emphasises ethical AI governance and collaboration with allies, China's vast troves of data and state-backed AI investments position it as a formidable competitor in the race for AI supremacy.

Supply Chain Resilience: Friend-Shoring and Regionalisation

The disruptions caused by the trade war and the COVID-19 pandemic have accelerated the push for supply chain resilience and diversification.



Image credit: VCG/ Getty Images

The era of hyper-globalisation, where companies prioritized cost-efficiency above all else, is being replaced by a more strategic approach that balances economic security with geopolitical considerations. To do this, the concept of friend-shoring, or shifting production to politically aligned nations, has gained momentum. Apple, for instance, has moved a portion of its iPhone production from China to India and Vietnam, with India now projected to produce 25% of all iPhones by 2025. Similarly, U.S. firms are increasingly investing in Mexico as a nearshoring hub, with trade between the two nations reaching a record \$779 billion in 2022. In addition, reshoring, the idea of bringing manufacturing back to domestic markets, is also accelerating as the U.S. and other Western nations have committed billions of dollars in subsidies to boost critical industries such as domestic semiconductor and pharmaceutical facilities in hopes of becoming more self-sufficient and reducing dependence on traditional manufacturing hubs in China.

Currency Wars and the Challenge to Dollar Dominance

The global financial system is undergoing a profound transformation as nations increasingly seek alternatives to the long-standing

dominance of the U.S. dollar. Since 2018, efforts to de-dollarise have accelerated, particularly among countries facing U.S. sanctions or looking to reduce their dependence on the dollar. In the past two decades, the share of global reserves held in U.S. dollars has steadily declined, from 71% in 1999 to approximately 59% in 2023. Central banks have diversified into assets like gold, the euro, and other alternative currencies in response to growing concerns over the dollar's monopoly. China has been a key player in this shift, actively promoting the yuan as an alternative in global trade.

At the same time, China's digital yuan, already piloted in major cities and used for cross-border trade with Hong Kong, poses a direct challenge to traditional financial systems like SWIFT because it offers a faster, more efficient,

and state-controlled alternative to current international payment systems. Unlike traditional payment networks which rely on intermediaries and are subject to sanctions or political influence, the digital yuan operates on a blockchain-like system, enabling direct transactions between parties without the need for third-party banks. This not only reduces transaction costs and processing times but also gives China more control over international transactions, reducing the global reliance on the U.S. dollar and undermining the dominance of financial institutions like SWIFT. China's ambitions in digital currencies as alternative financial mechanisms are expected to account for a growing share of global transactions, gradually weakening the dollar's dominance and contributing to a more fragmented global financial landscape.

Economic Statecraft: Weaponising Trade and Investment



Image credit: Reuters/ File photo

Most importantly, geopolitical tensions will continue to shape global economic policies, with trade restrictions, sanctions, and investment controls becoming key tools of economic statecraft. The U.S. has expanded its use of sanctions to counter China's economic rise. Chinese firms like Huawei or ZTE have been targeted, accused of human rights violations, military development, and intellectual property theft. The Biden administration also imposed strict export controls on critical technologies, particularly in AI and quantum computing, to slow China's technological advancements. In response, China has strengthened its own regulatory framework, introducing the Anti-Foreign Sanctions Law and expanding its 'unreliable entities list' to counter Western economic pressure. Additionally, China is leveraging its economic influence through coercive trade practices, as seen in its restrictions on Australian coal in 2020 and rare earth exports to Japan in 2010. In the coming decade, the global economy will be increasingly divided along geopolitical lines, with nations forced to navigate a more fragmented, protectionist, and strategically competitive landscape. Whether this economic decoupling continues or stabilises will depend on diplomatic negotiations, policy adjustments, and the evolving power dynamics between the world's two largest economies.

The US-China trade war has ushered in an era of competition, fragmentation, and shifting alliances. Over the next decade, countries will face difficult choices as economic blocs form. While these shifts may strengthen resilience and encourage innovation, they also risk fueling deeper geopolitical divisions, making

international cooperation harder to achieve. The past decade has proven that economic interdependence is not a guarantee of stability. The breakdown of trade relationships, the scramble for technological dominance, and the growing use of economic policies as political weapons have forced countries to rethink their strategies. Nations that once embraced globalisation are now focused on self-reliance and securing access to critical resources. However, closing off economies entirely is not a viable solution. The world cannot afford to retreat into isolationism or turn economic competition into outright confrontation.

Ultimately, what happens next will depend on the choices made today.

‘The world cannot afford to retreat into isolationism or turn economic competition into outright competition.’

Governments must find ways to compete without cutting off opportunities for collaboration where it matters most – whether in climate change, technological innovation, or global financial stability. The challenge is not just to adapt to this new reality but to shape it in a way that avoids further division. The coming years will be a test of leadership, strategy, and diplomacy. If handled wisely, this period of economic realignment could lead to a more balanced, global economy. If mishandled, it could cement an era of prolonged instability and uncertainty. The future is still unwritten, but one thing is clear: the decisions made now will define the next decade and beyond.

The views expressed in this article are the author's own and may not reflect the opinions of The St Andrews Economist.



Image credit: Shutterstock



Image credit: FotografiaBasica/ Getty Images

A photograph of three Ukrainian soldiers in combat gear. The soldier on the left wears a helmet with a Ukrainian flag patch and a tactical vest. The soldier in the center wears a camouflage helmet and a dark jacket. The soldier on the right wears a dark helmet and a camouflage uniform with a Ukrainian flag patch on the sleeve. A Ukrainian flag is visible in the background. The text "Global Security" is overlaid in the center in a white, italicized serif font.

Global Security



CANADA'S ARMED FORCES AT A CROSSROADS

By Rowland Legg

The Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) have a storied history – from the Boer War to Vimy Ridge and beyond – but they now face new and critical pressures. Today, they contend with a recruiting shortage, outdated platforms, and an evolving threat environment in the Far North. These challenges are testing the force's operational readiness and raising questions about Canada's priorities, which need to be addressed in an increasingly dangerous world. The outcome of Canada's April 28th election will likely direct the future of the CAF.

The CAF's most critical issue lies in personnel. Current reports of its personnel strength show alarming numbers of unfilled positions – 16% of the target 71,500 stand unfilled – which is having an increasingly detrimental impact on the force's operational capacity. Meanwhile, Canada's American neighbour has posted the highest recruitment numbers in 15 years. As is apparent, young men are the most sought after demographic for any military,

and there seems to be a broad disinterest among Canada's young men to enlist and serve their country. This needs to change if Canada is to have a functional fighting force. The shortfalls in personnel have had very tangible impacts; overstretched units have limited capacity for training, domestic disaster response, and international commitments.

Just as pressing a challenge is the state of the CAF's equipment. Much of the inventory is decades old and essentially obsolete, and additionally, the procurement of new systems such as the Lockheed Martin F-35 fighter jet has yet to be delivered. Recently, disputes with the US over President Trump's tariff policy have prompted the new government – led by former Governor of the Bank of England Mark Carney – to threaten to cancel the acquisition of American-made Lockheed warplanes. Even if this procurement does continue, full integration of these planes is years away, as no Canadian pilots have experience operating these advanced aircraft.

Furthermore, as Canada is yet to acquire a 5th generation F-35 aircraft,



Image credit: @pierrepoillievrem via Instagram

Trump has announced a new contract for Boeing to construct the first 6th generation F-47 warplane squadrons.

In Canada's Far North, which has the second largest territorial area of the 8 countries in the Arctic region, the Russian invasion of Ukraine has increased tensions between Moscow and the seven other nations which are all American allies through NATO. This once mostly inaccessible region is growing in geopolitical importance. Rising global temperatures are inducing ice melt, opening commercial and military sea lanes. In addition, the thawing ice is revealing largely untapped natural resources, including undersea oil reserves, rare



Image credit: Sgt. Sara Graham,
Marine Forces Reserve/ DVIDs

earth minerals, and metal deposits. For the CAF, tasked with asserting Canada's sovereignty over this vast, evolving arctic territory, this shift necessitates enhanced response capabilities. Strengthening the CAF's northern posture, in cooperation with NATO allies, requires significant investment in new assets while managing competing domestic and international priorities.

With the election now concluded and

‘Pressure is mounting for him to prioritise defence modernisation in light of global tensions.’

Mark Carney securing victory over Conservative Leader Pierre Poilievre, the future of the CAF under his leadership begins to take shape. While both candidates had underscored the strategic importance of the Arctic and the need to strengthen Canada's

military posture, Carney now faces the challenge of addressing the armed forces' recruitment crisis, aging equipment, and northern security concerns. Despite his earlier position that military spending would not be raised to NATO's 2% target during a first term, pressure is mounting for his government to prioritise defence modernisation in light of global tensions and Canada's growing strategic responsibilities in the Arctic. The direction Carney takes in the coming months will be crucial in determining whether the CAF can effectively respond to emerging threats and reassert Canada's sovereignty on the world stage.

The views expressed in this article are the author's own and may not reflect the opinions of The St Andrews Economist.



Image credit: Getty Images



The Future of Development



HOW WILL THE FALL OF USAID AND DFID SHAPE THE FUTURE OF INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT?

By Sarah Caldwell

The United States Agency for International Development (USAID) was established in 1961 by President John F. Kennedy as an independent agency of the US Government, responsible for civil foreign aid and development assistance. The original motivation behind USAID was to promote democracy and combat the spread of communism and the efforts of the USSR during the Cold War.

After the Cold War, USAID was defunded and widely recognised as futile. This was until after the 9/11 terrorist attacks when the agency was kick-started again with the intent of stopping the spread of terrorism in the Middle East and around the world. Since 2001, USAID has grown to become one of the world's largest aid agencies—with a budget of \$40 billion in 2023 (0.22% of US GNI), USAID contributes the highest amount of

international aid in dollar terms of any country or organisation.

The Department For International Development (DFID) was established in 1997 by Prime Minister Tony Blair as a ministerial department of the government of the United Kingdom. The department was established to reduce global poverty and support the United Nation's eight millennium development goals.

In 2013, the UK became the first G7 country to achieve the UN goal of spending 0.7% of gross national income (GNI) on official development assistance. The UK has since been one of the largest contributors to international development in Europe, with only Denmark, Norway, the Netherlands, Luxembourg, and Sweden having now hit the 0.7% threshold.

Over the past decade, American and British aid has been essential to global health and disaster relief,



USAID staff offload emergency supplies. Image credit: USAID Press Office.

development efforts, environmental sustainability, and the promotion of human rights—including gender equality, education, and democratic governance. In Africa, Asia, Latin America, the Middle East, and Eastern Europe, USAID and DFID have helped millions of people through immediate life-saving aid and long-term development programmes.

A key example of USAID's success was its fundamental, lasting contribution to the eradication of the wild poliovirus in 2020.

Before its eradication, estimates suggest that around 75,000 children were paralysed by polio on the continent of Africa each year.

DFID had a similar impact during the humanitarian crisis in Yemen, providing critical assistance with clean drinking water, food assistance, protection, shelter, and health services. Between April 2019 and March 2020, DFID provided over 400,000 children and pregnant and breastfeeding women with nutrition interventions.

Now as the world faces devastating conflicts in Ukraine, Gaza, the Congo, and beyond, international aid is needed more than ever. So why are USAID and DFID seemingly being abandoned?

Present

On January 20, President Trump, under the guidance of Elon Musk's Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE), signed an executive order instituting a 90-day pause in all US foreign development assistance. The executive order calls for the dismantling of all foreign assistance programmes that do not 'fully align with the foreign policy of the President of the United States.'

Now, despite the rulings of municipal courts and the supreme court in favour of USAID funding, DOGE has gained access to the agency's financial system and the personal data of all of its employees. Thousands of USAID



Image credit: Ben Birchall/ PA

federal employees have been fired or put on leave as a result, rendering the agency fractured and unable to operate.

Across the Atlantic, Prime Minister Keir Starmer has announced plans to increase defense spending to 2.5% of national income by 2027. This increase in defence spending will be entirely funded by a decrease in the DFID budget to 0.3% of GNI, the largest cut to UK overseas aid in history.

‘The actions taken by both administrations represent a significant shift in mindset away from international development.’

The augmentation of defense spending comes in response to the Trump Administration's handling of the war in Ukraine which has left Europe scrambling to re-establish its military prowess in order to defend Ukraine against Russia. When asked whether the decision was triggered by Trump's proposed ceasefire deal, Starmer responded, 'I think in our heart of hearts we've all known that this decision has been coming for three



Image credit: Getty Images/ BBC

years, since the beginning of the conflict in Ukraine.'

The actions taken by both administrations represent a significant shift in mindset away from international development and soft power. Since the beginning of the twenty-first century, international aid and development has largely been considered a vessel through which Western countries could garner the trust of and influence over underdeveloped countries - not anymore.

The influence of soft power is one of the main drivers behind foreign aid, but it is not the only one. International development - used to prevent wars, dictatorships, and global health outbreaks - can decrease the displacement of refugees, promote stronger economies for trade, and lessen the risk of the spread of dangerous epidemics, among many other benefits to countries that provide aid, like the US and UK.

In defense of international aid, former DFID administrator and

Rory Stewart stated, 'It is extremely foolish, in fact, to put all of your money into building weapons systems if a much smaller amount of money, spent in the right way, can actually stop the conflict from breaking out in the first place.'

Yet, regardless of which approach is better for the US and the UK, the reductions in funding of USAID have already had serious humanitarian consequences over the past month. In Myanmar, for instance, a woman died from lung failure after the USAID-sponsored hospital she was staying in was forced to close.

Similarly, the fate of millions of HIV/AIDS treatment recipients hangs in the balance as the USAID budget freeze has halved the budget of the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS. The timing of treatment is particularly sensitive for these recipients as the disease can accelerate and begin to spread in less than a month if treatment is not administered on time.

'This is already killing people, like this is no kidding killing people,' said Jeremy Kondyk, former senior USAID official under Obama and Biden. 'The numbers are not yet huge but if it continues... this will become huge.'

The effects have yet to be seen for the decrease in DFID funding, but the impact across the board will be nothing short of drastic.

Future

According to Tom Fletcher, Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs, the UN is facing the most severe crisis in humanitarian aid since the Second World War. Earlier this month he stated, 'The pace and scale of the funding cuts are a seismic shock to the sector ... Many will die because aid is drying up. Right now, programmes are shutting down, staff are being laid off, and we are being forced to choose which lives to

prioritise.'

The UN, IMF, and World Bank –once huge forces for change – are now at risk of eradication. The legitimacy of these organisations relies predominantly on the financial and vocal support of the US and UK, and without it, they may fail to maintain ongoing programmes through the next decade.

What would a world without USAID, DFID, or the UN look like? Well, such a world has already emerged in many parts of Africa over the last two decades through large-scale Chinese and Russian investment.

China is already Africa's largest bilateral trading partner, occupying 20% of the continent's exports and 16% of its imports (\$282 billion in total trade volume in 2023). China is also Africa's largest bilateral creditor; its share of total sub-Saharan African external public debt was less than 2% before 2005, growing to 17% by 2021 (\$134 billion in total).

Russia has occupied a similarly vacant position through the influence of private security companies and army mercenaries; Putin's 'hidden army' has secured several bilateral agreements in Central Africa, permitting them exclusive rights to gold and diamond mines as well as other natural resources. The Russian army has permeated so deeply into the Central African Republic that billboards found across the country read, 'Russia: hand in hand with your army!'

Left: Posters across Bangui reminiscent of Soviet propaganda. The poster reads: 'Central African Republic is hand in hand with Russia' and 'talk a little, work a lot.' Credit: Sebastian Shula/ CNN



Both China and Russia recognise the need for raw materials and rare earths like lithium, cobalt, and nickel, to be vital for the future of the energy revolution, electricity, and computing. If this trend is allowed to continue as it is, they have the potential to create a vacuum effect, and the US, UK, and Europe will be forced out entirely.

Yet the two countries' influence is not limited to the African continent; they are taking on conflicts and filling roles around the world that the US and UK used to oversee. In Nepal, for instance, China's influence through foreign direct investment (FDI) and humanitarian aid since 2014 has led to the election of a pro-China President and the reliance of Nepal on trading almost exclusively within Chinese markets.

It is impossible to estimate how quickly China and Russia will emerge as world dominators of soft power, but it is becoming more apparent that this role will no longer be occupied by the US or the UK. A seismic shift in the balance of power across the globe is

inevitable if USAID and DFID cannot operate effectively, and this may be a choice that both countries come to regret.

Even still, it is the people at risk who matter most. These millions of lives should not be traded around in the budget-balancing and nation-building strategies of the world's richest countries. Ultimately, the US, UK, and all of Europe have a responsibility to help rebuild the places in the world that they exploited through centuries of colonialism, and international aid is the most obvious remedy for healing these wounds.

The state of international aid will likely look entirely different in the next ten years, but the Western world must look to the past to remember why these organisations were founded and how much good they have truly done around the world.

The views expressed in this article are the author's own and may not reflect the opinions of The St Andrews Economist.

Below: Chinese President Xi Jinping meets with Nepali Prime Minister KP Sharma Oli in December 2024. Image credit: Xinhua

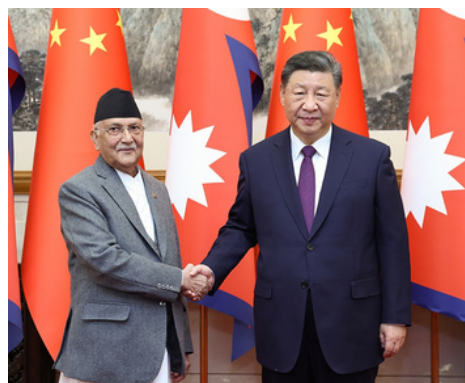


Image credit: Jordan Urban/Institute for Government

A large, dense crowd of people is gathered for a protest or demonstration. Many individuals are holding up handmade signs and flags. In the foreground, a prominent sign reads "NO SON \$30 SON 30 AÑOS" (They are not \$30, they are 30 years old). Other visible signs include "¡NO PASEN A OMBOS!" and "¡NO PASAN A OMBOS!". The crowd is diverse in age and appearance, and the atmosphere appears energetic and passionate. The background shows some greenery and urban structures.

Social Justice & Human Rights



HUMAN TRAFFICKING IN THE DIGITAL AGE

By Alix Ramillon

Human trafficking has become one of the most profitable forms of organised crime, estimated to have a global revenue of around \$150 billion annually in 2025. Historically, trafficking has taken three main forms—forced labour (including sex trafficking), forced marriage, and forced organ removal. But with the rise of AI and cryptocurrencies, traffickers are now better equipped to bypass legal scrutiny, making it even harder for justice to be served and for victims to escape exploitation.

Looking Back

In 2015, the Syrian civil war and other regional conflicts led to a sharp increase in the number of vulnerable refugees trafficked across Europe and the Middle East. Many of these individuals were not registered within the framework of UNHCR, fleeing war zones and caught in the chaos of internal

displacement and grey zones occupied by Da'ish (ISIS/ISIL/IS). European responses, such as the FRONTEX border pushbacks, shifted the responsibility for protection to neighbouring states, pushing refugees toward smugglers—many of whom functioned as traffickers.

Although the 2003 UN Palermo Protocol laid out a framework to combat trafficking, its implementation was often selective and politically motivated. After the Syrian crisis, the EU framed trafficking as a regional



Image credit: Fabrizio Bensch/Reuters

issue, largely ignoring its own internal role. Meanwhile, victims – primarily exploited through forced labour, sexual abuse, and criminal coercion – frequently fell through legal and institutional cracks.

Now

In 2025, the nature of trafficking has shifted dramatically. The International Labour Organisation estimates that 27.6 million people globally are now victims of forced labour or sexual exploitation. The pandemic's economic fallout has worsened vulnerabilities as social services and victim support networks were cut. Law enforcement priorities have shifted, increasing the risk of re-trafficking.

Technology plays a central role in this evolution. Encrypted chats, disposable social media accounts, and data sold by brokers enable traffickers to identify and isolate victims with alarming precision. Digital anonymity protects the perpetrators while exposing victims to long-term exploitation. Today, traffickers target people online using webcams, temporary chat rooms, or fake job offers.

What's more, trafficking networks have evolved into diverse, decentralised operations that blur the lines between cyber and physical crime. Networks linked to organised crime syndicates such as 'Broken Tooth' now exploit legal loopholes in the 'Golden Triangle,' taking advantage of unstable regimes in Myanmar's Special Economic Zones (SEZs). These operations are hubs for labour exploitation, online scams, and 'pig-butcher' cons.

Even large-scale infrastructure initiatives such as China's Belt and

Road Initiative (BRI) have faced scrutiny for indirectly enabling forced labour in construction and mining projects.

Technology: Tool and Threat

AI and blockchain technology offer both promise and peril. Tools like facial recognition and digital forensics have potential to identify victims and trace criminal operations. Blockchain-based systems could help verify worker recruitment and payment, increasing transparency in vulnerable industries.

But technology is also a powerful enabler of trafficking. Deepfakes are now used to blackmail victims. AI algorithms enhance psychological manipulation, and cryptocurrency allows for untraceable transactions. Networks like Huione Guarantee have processed over \$70 billion in crypto using generative AI and stolen data to target 'quick kill' victims.

A decade ago, trafficking largely affected migrants, minors, and impoverished populations. But now,



Image credit: Council of Europe Portal

anyone – from expats and online daters to freelancers – can be drawn in. Social media has made it easier to prey on individuals using isolation, economic pressure, or romantic deception.

This shift in target demographics complicates how we view both victims and perpetrators. As media coverage matures, platforms like *The Economist's Scam Inc.* podcast explore the increasingly blurred line between coerced criminals and their exploiters.

The global community has taken steps to address these evolving threats. The G7's Mediterranean plan to combat trafficking focuses primarily on law enforcement, calling for specialised units to investigate migrant smuggling. Critics argue this approach prioritises security over humanitarian protections. Governments must go further by: enforcing blockchain transparency in global supply chains; supporting AI-based victim identification; regulating crypto platforms that enable trafficking; funding victim rehabilitation and awareness programmes.

Legal responses are evolving. New laws like the UK's Border Security Bill, South Korea's deepfake regulations, and the EU's AI Act suggest a growing recognition of technology's role in trafficking. But enforcement remains fragmented, and international collaboration is urgently needed.

Human trafficking has adapted quickly to our digital world—and our efforts to stop it must evolve even faster. AI, if properly regulated, could become a powerful tool for prevention. Cryptocurrencies must be monitored, and data privacy protections strengthened. Blockchain might help detect patterns of exploitation, but its full potential depends on transparent governance. As we look to the future, coordinated international action, stronger victim protection, and proactive digital policies will be key. The tools to disrupt human trafficking already exist. Now it's a question of using them before the networks grow more advanced and the victims more invisible.

The views expressed in this article are the author's own and may not reflect the opinions of The St Andrews Economist.

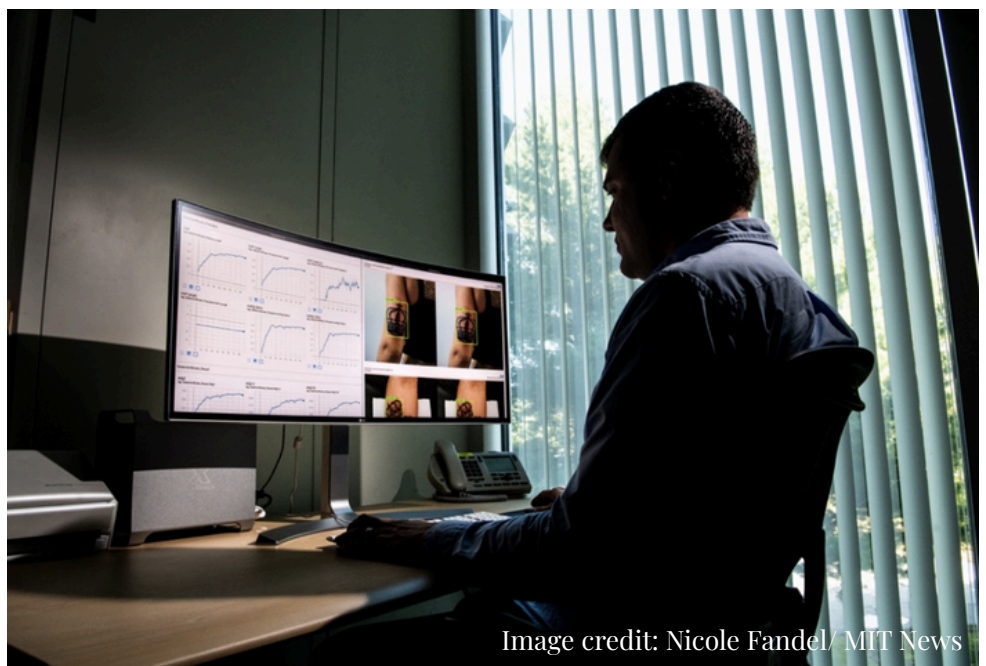


Image credit: Nicole Fandel/ MIT News



THE RISE OF THE FAR-RIGHT IN EUROPE: A GENDER PERSPECTIVE



Image credit: James Ferguson/ Financial Times

By Emilia Bozza

The steady rise of far right parties at both national and international levels suggests that more centrist parties could face large losses in support over the next decade. Commentators have termed this exodus of support from the mainstream to the far-right as ‘political cannibalism’, where the popularity of the far-right is forcing the centre-right to accommodate more radical stances on issues such as immigration in the hope of clawing back voters. An emerging trend amongst Europe’s growing far-right is their ability to tap into certain voter demographics, particularly young men. These young voters therefore provide a lifeline for the far-right to grow in the future, often at the expense of political unity between men and women and inclusion of racial and sexual minorities.

Why the far-right?

The leaders of Europe’s far-right parties are key to understanding their

growing success in appealing to many young men. Germany’s election last month resulted in a record achievement for *Alternative für Deutschland* (AfD) as they acquired 151 seats in the Bundestag, making them the most successful far right group since 1933. Given the party’s islamophobic comments and xenophobic stances on immigration, its openly homosexual West German leader Alice Weidel seems a rogue focal figure for AfD supporters, who are largely white East German men without tertiary education. Terming Weidel a ‘fig leaf’, the investigative magazine *Der Spiegel* claims that Weidel’s identity can be used to rebut accusations of the AfD as misogynistic and homophobic. Thus, Weidel’s success suggests that the semi-autocratic ultra-masculine archetype often associated with Hungary’s Viktor Orban. In fact, the supposed paradox between Weidel’s identity and politics could be argued

argued to be instrumental to the German far right’s growing popularity, as her presence allows the AfD to entice the politically uncertain and the middle class by softening their radical, and often violent politics with traditional ideals of femininity and the nuclear family.

Whilst the same could be said for Marine Le Pen in France and Giorgia Meloni in Italy, a closer examination reveals that there are variations between how these prominent female far-right politicians use their gender as a political advantage.

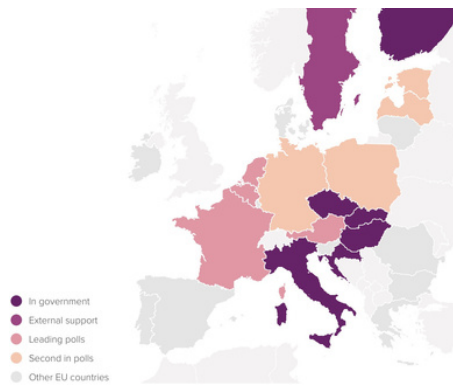
Le Pen took the reins of Le Front National in 2011 and rebranded it as the Rassemblement National, which distanced it from its history of anti-Semitism, homophobia and misogyny. Whilst she abandons the term ‘feminism’, Le Pen has successfully used women’s rights issues to appeal to the female working-class voter

and to amass further political support for her claim that Islam is not compatible with France's secular society. By promoting the notion that immigration poses a threat to women's freedoms, Le Pen has distorted the boundaries between the rhetoric of the French political left and right, using the language of liberal feminism (a typically left-wing ideology) to promote restrictions on immigration and multiculturalism (a typically right-wing policy). Thus, compared to Weidel's more traditional ideas of femininity, Le Pen has, and continues to, paint the RN as a defender of women's rights, even going against her peers to vote to enshrine the right to abortion in the French constitution. This contributed to the massive swing in support to the RN in the first round of the French legislative elections last year, where they acquired a 33.2% share of the popular vote.

In Italy, Meloni has also been successful in softening the hard-right *Fratelli d'Italia*. Like Le Pen, she's also been able to increase the party's female vote, which represented 26% of Italian women in 2022. However, Meloni uses her identity as a woman differently to Le Pen, focusing more on Christian motherhood, and has been accused of setting back abortion rights, contrary to her promise not to change the legal status of abortion. Thus, Meloni's conservatism places her in a similar camp to Wiedel, although the ways in which they construct their respective political images through gender are still very different.

Despite their varying attitudes to womanhood, the rise of these women marks a significant trend of right-wing parties adopting female leadership to dispel the connotations of the far-right as threatening and misogynistic.

However, not all of Europe's far-right parties are following this trend. Spain's Vox party, led by Santiago Abascal, targets immigration as the cause of Spain's 26.5% rate of youth unemployment, which is nearly twice the European average. Abascal uses



A Map of rising far-right parties in Europe. Source: Giovanna Chi/ Politico research

the popular platforms of Instagram and TikTok to empathise with the economic dissatisfaction felt by young people, but has not yet reached the victory seen by his counterparts in Italy and Hungary.

Why predominantly young men?

Disparities in education and the progress in women's rights and opportunities have resulted in an anti-feminist backlash amongst many young men, which far-right parties

have exploited. In 2020, European women were more likely to have a university education than European men, with 46% of women earning tertiary degrees compared to 35% of men. The progress made by women in education, work and politics over the 21st century presents somewhat of a threat by increasing job market competition. However, this apparent dichotomy between young men feeling that 'feminism has gone too far' and the growing presence of women in far-right leadership positions demonstrates the flexibility of gender as a category within far-right politics.

Whilst the majority of far-right political campaigns seem to primarily target young men, young women have also aligned themselves with Europe's emerging far-right. In particular, last year's European Parliament elections saw the closing of the French far-right's gender gap, as 30% of female voters and 32% of male voters chose the RN's Jordan Bardella.

Overall, gender provides a unique and essential framework of analysis for the far right's growing presence in European political arenas, with female political figures often acting as a distraction from more radical and violent undercurrents. Understanding the complex role of gender in European politics continues to be important as far-right ideology becomes more and more mainstream over the next decade.

The views expressed in this article are the author's own and may not reflect the opinions of The St Andrews Economist.

A full-page background image showing a silhouette of a cow standing in a field at sunset. The sun is a bright, glowing orb in the upper center, casting a warm orange light across the sky and silhouetting the trees and the cow. The cow is facing left, and its shadow is cast on the ground. To the left of the cow is a dark, rectangular object, possibly a trough or a fence. The ground is covered in dry grass or straw.

Climate Futures



FROM PLEDGES TO REALITY: HAS THE PARIS AGREEMENT DELIVERED IN ITS FIRST DECADE?

By Helen Street

The Paris Agreement has reached its 10th anniversary, representing a decade of international commitment to combating climate change, but has it delivered? The agreement was adopted by 196 countries in 2015 at the [UN Climate Change Conference \(COP21\)](#) with the goal of limiting average global temperature increase to below 2°C, or ideally below 1.5. The framework relies on voluntary, non-binding Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs), updated every five years with increasing ambition. This flexibility allowed countries to make ambitious targets without fear of retribution, but equally, it raises concerns about accountability and effectiveness. As the world continues to face rising temperatures, is the Paris Agreement a sufficient framework for meaningful climate action, or is it destined to fail?

Over the last decade, there has been a positive global trend towards zero-carbon strategies and carbon neutrality targets. Countries responsible for 70% of the world's emissions have made long-term pledges to cut emissions to net zero by 2050. Significant progress has also been made in the renewable energy sector as China reached its 2030 renewable energy goal six years early and built wind and solar infrastructure capable of generating 37% of its total power. Globally, low-emission sources are predicted to be able to generate more than half of the world's electricity by 2030. This global shift towards renewable energy and net-zero commitments is a testament to the Paris Agreement's success in influencing and shaping climate action.

In addition to emissions reductions, the Paris Agreement has established a climate finance sector. The [agreement](#) expects developed countries to

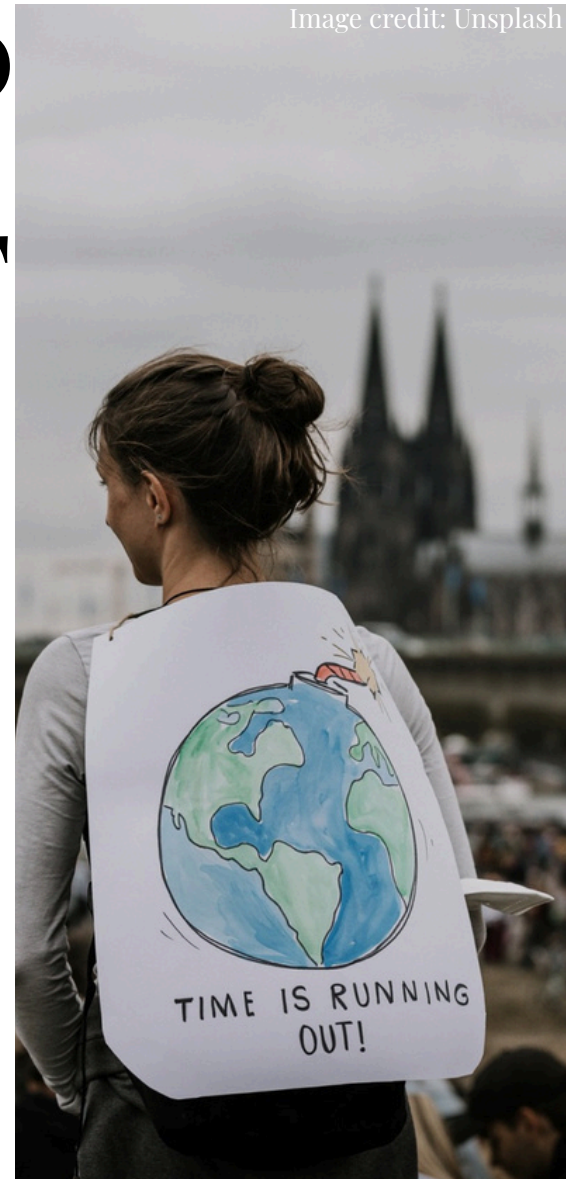


Image credit: Unsplash

financially support developing nations to allow them to meet the climate targets they might otherwise struggle to fund. The [Green Climate Fund \(GCF\)](#) was originally established in 2010 but was a key feature of the Paris Agreement. Money invested in the GCF is used to support developing countries in fulfilling their NDC ambitions. The goal is for developed countries to jointly fund [USD \\$100 billion](#) per year beginning in 2020, but was not reached [until 2022](#).

Despite successes in renewable energy,

technology innovations, and climate finance, current climate pledges are not sufficient to meet the Paris Agreement's goals. It is estimated that if existing NDCs are implemented, temperature rise will reach 3–4°C above pre-industrial averages, well above the 1.5°C or 2°C goals. In fact, 2024 saw global mean temperatures 1.55°C above the pre-industrial average. The 1.5°C target refers to keeping average temperatures below an increase of 1.5°C compared to the pre-industrial baseline of 1850–1900. While it is true that in 2024 this target was not met, that is not to say that the Paris Agreement has failed just yet.

The agreement focuses on long-term averages, not individual years. For example, the 10 years from 2014–2023 were estimated to be .2°C above the pre-industrial baseline. Even if we do overshoot, it is likely still possible to return to 1.5°C in the long run if the peak is around 1.7–1.8°C.

The difference between 1.5°C and 2°C is significant. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) has written a detailed special report on the impacts of this amount of warming, concluding that it will have serious consequences, but limiting to 1.5°C can help prevent some of the most extreme effects.

The IPCC has already observed rising global temperatures, resulting in more frequent heat waves. Limiting to 1.5°C is predicted to lessen the number of people exposed to extreme heatwaves by 420 million as compared to the 2°C scenario. Urban areas will be especially vulnerable because of the heat island effect amplifying heatwaves in cities. Additionally, temperature rises will expand the geographic range of diseases like malaria, demonstrating the human health risks associated with climate change.

Precipitation patterns will also intensify, with increased risk of drought in the Mediterranean and Southern African regions. At the same time, there will be more intense rainfall globally. Tropical cyclones will increase in intensity, increasing the risk to both human life and infrastructure in hurricane-prone areas. Hurricane-prone areas will face challenges with insurance, leaving many without coverage.

Beyond the direct impact on Earth systems, climate change will also indirectly affect energy, food, and water security. Certain regions of Africa and Asia are expected to be especially vulnerable to shortages of water and food. Crop yields are also predicted to decline significantly, especially in sub-Saharan Africa, Southeast Asia, and Central and South America. Ocean acidification associated with carbon absorption will threaten fisheries and aquaculture, further putting global food security at risk.

Ultimately, while economically disadvantaged populations will likely experience the greatest challenges first, climate change is a global issue. Regions will experience climate change differently, but no region is isolated from the global changes predicted in the coming century. Keeping warming below 1.5°C is not just an environmental goal, but an essential target for safeguarding human life and global stability.

Although countries in the EU, Scandinavia, along with the UK, Switzerland, New Zealand, and Iceland have led the way in decarbonisation, global carbon-intensive energy use continues to rise.



While the Paris Agreement has set a strong precedent, the framework lacks an enforcement mechanism. It relies on voluntary participation and peer pressure. NDC pledges need to be turned into tangible action in the form of policy changes, investments, and programs. The transparency framework has the potential to be effective in encouraging countries to make and meet goals, but it has no mechanism to ensure goals are ambitious enough to meet the 1.5°C target. This overall lack of enforcement makes the Paris Agreement inherently aspirational rather than a framework set up to achieve real changes.

The biggest challenge that the Paris Agreement has faced in recent years is the United States' withdrawal. At the beginning of Trump's first term in 2017 and again at the beginning of his second in 2025, the US announced it would be withdrawing funding and participation, making it one of only four countries not party to the agreement. Over the course of the first Trump administration, over 100 environmental rules were rolled back, and he has vowed to remove more. The non-participation of the U.S. is expected to reverse more than a third of the world's emissions reductions. Additionally, Trump has pledged to increase fossil fuel extraction with the slogan 'Drill, Baby, Drill.' This has influenced other countries to question their own climate actions. The United States' actions have not only impacted the environment but have also damaged their credibility and the credibility of the Paris Agreement more generally.

During the agreement's prime, financial markets saw reduced participation in investment in high-carbon firms, but in response to the

this trend reversed. The financial sector has the potential to be a valuable asset in climate action. The flow of investment towards low-carbon firms served as a signal to policymakers. As more countries make credible climate commitments, increased investment in technology helps drive innovation and lower costs. However, U.S. withdrawal from the Paris Agreement undermines the credibility of all the agreement's pledges, causing investors to pull back from sustainable finance.

Is 1.5°C Still Achievable?

For average global temperatures to be kept below 1.5°C, drastic changes will need to be made. Emissions need to be significantly reduced by 2030 and global net-zero carbon pledges need to be met by 2050. The 1.5°C goal is still possible but will require immediate action by countries to submit and fully implement new NDCs which are significantly more ambitious. Important areas to focus on are policies which encourage renewable energy while actively discouraging fossil fuels.

The IPCC has warned that limiting global warming to 1.5°C depends on strict regulations on total greenhouse gas emissions. To stay under this threshold, global emissions must reach net zero before the cumulative emissions limit is surpassed. If this cap is exceeded, the world will need to achieve net negative emissions by removing greenhouse gases from the atmosphere.

Additionally, the focusing of carbon markets on effective technologies is important. Net-zero targets are typically met through countering carbon emissions through funding projects that promise to reduce carbon in the atmosphere, but the

popular method of using trees to achieve this goal is insufficient in the long term.

Other barriers to implementing climate adaptation measures discussed by the IPCC include a lack of up-to-date and locally relevant information, making it difficult for policymakers to make informed decisions. Furthermore, limited access to finance and technology restricts adaptation efforts, particularly in regions where resources are scarce. Social values and attitudes also pose challenges, as climate action requires efforts from the general public as well as governments. Additionally, institutional constraints can slow or obstruct the implementation of adaptation strategies.

While the 1.5°C target is still possible, albeit with an overshoot, it will require great political and economic commitment to achieve. With the withdrawal of the U.S. and the faltering credibility of the Paris Agreement, it is unlikely that such a goal is feasible within the current framework. The lack of enforcement and reliance on voluntary action in the Paris Agreement are not enough for the drastic steps necessary for climate change today. A new framework needs to be developed, but it will require urgency and cooperation from all global powers, which has yet to be demonstrated.

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A DECADE OF LAUDATO SI': HOW RELIGIOUS DISCOURSE HAS SHAPED THE CLIMATE CONVERSATION



Image credit: Unsplash

By Oscar Braun

Almost a decade ago, a papal letter was released by Pope Francis, head of the Catholic Church. As a religious leader, it is expected that he produces literature and contributes to knowledge creation and distribution of the faith he leads; however, his letter offered much more than just guidance on how to live according to faith. It also provided guidance on how to live in harmony with our planet, redefining the intersection between faith and the climate. The opening passage establishes a theme of respect, not only to God but also to the Earth we live on and the Earth that sustains us. This letter catalysed the emergence of climate discourse in the sphere of religion. Whilst tensions have always existed between religion and science, Pope Francis' letter

brought together both sides to address the urgency of the climate crisis.

'Praise be to you'

The first words of the title translate as 'praise be to you', referencing the words of St. Francis of Assisi's Canticle of the Creatures, praising the brilliance of nature and natural forces. The letter begins by addressing the problems we face, namely pollution, climate change, water scarcity, loss of biodiversity, and global inequality. Then, it goes on to talk about the human roots of the ecological crisis, how we have used technology to control and fight nature. It argues how our separation from nature has led to a pursuit of dominance over the natural world.

In an era when much of the discussion on the climate crisis is confined to policy circles, easily accessible information is rare, often buried deep in academic papers. By reorientating the problem through a moral, ethical, and less technical lens, the reason behind the need for urgent action becomes clearer. This letter started a movement, and owing to the vast reach of the Catholic Church, every bishop worldwide was able to read and spread the word, disseminating an important message that uses a religious context to spread.

The impact of the encyclical (the letter sent out to every bishop) goes far beyond raising awareness. How often is it that a Vatican-issued

letter – over 100 pages long – gets international attention? The letter's release coincided with the 2015 Paris Climate Summit, and the Paris Climate Agreement that came out of it. The takeaway of 'caring for our common home' was central, and people paid attention. The impact of the letter was felt far beyond the confines of the Catholic Church. The question is, are we still paying attention today?

The Initial Reception

The initial response was positive from people of different backgrounds – Politicians, scientists, academics and religious leaders from all faiths welcomed Pope Francis' statements. Achim Steiner, Director of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), said that science and religion were in agreement on one point: 'we have to act now'. By publicly endorsing the Pope's message, Barack Obama signalled its significance to the world, stating: '*As we prepare for global climate negotiations in Paris this December,*



Image credit: Tara Trapani/ Yale Forum on Religion and Ecology

Right: A graffiti depicting Pope Francis cleaning the sky from pollution, painted on a wall of Albano, near Rome, in 2019.

it is my hope that all world leaders — and all God's children — will reflect on Pope Francis's call to come together to care for our common home.'

The letter is said to have focussed global attention towards the ecological crisis ahead of the climate talks in Paris in December of the same year. Many scholars attribute the achievements of the Paris Agreement to background factors, like the mobilisation of social movements and an increased global spotlight on successful negotiations. The letter anticipated the global conversation that would ensue between 195 parties at the Conference Of the Parties (COP21) summit, with Pope Francis said to have 'inspired political cooperation leading up to pivotal international agreements'. His background as the first ever non-European Pope allowed for new perspectives on the developing world, ethical discourses, and intra-generational justice, the idea of equity and fairness between people alive today.

Criticism and Interfaith Responses

Laudato Si did not come without criticism. Whilst many economists acknowledged the moral framework of the letter, calling for altruism and aid from developed nations, they criticised the Pope's 'sweeping condemnations of markets and technology and his proposals for climate policy [that] are more likely to keep the global poor in their current state or make them worse off than they are to help alleviate poverty.' The facts and statements in the letter are well researched by experts from many fields, but many policy makers fear that the flawed economics in the proposals create unrealistic targets.

The impact of the letter not only bridged Catholic teachings and science but created a multi-faith dialogue on climate. Muslim scholars, for example, took the Pope's encyclical and framed it through an Islamic lens, viewing the environmental crisis as a symptom of a deeper spiritual malaise, one that has come about through the overconsumption and extravagance



Image credit: AP Photo/ Andrew Medichini/ Alamy

with which we live our lives. By referencing Muslim Mystic Ali-al-Khawwas, Pope Francis underscores the strong interfaith connection between Christian and Muslim teachings on the environment.

Has Climate Discourse truly changed?

Ten years on, has Laudato Si truly changed the discourse on climate action? It has not by itself caused any direct positive environmental changes, and specific policies cannot be attributed to it. However, its mobilisation of interfaith communities and organisations has been cited as monumental. In the end, it is governments and policy makers that hold the key to action, but for the political class to take the crisis seriously, influence and pressure must be put on the people with power. Pope Francis addressed the US Congress, the UN General Assembly, and numerous other political institutions worldwide. Although Laudato Si's impact cannot be measured quantitatively, many questions are being asked today that ten years ago were

hardly considered. For example, the issue of climate justice is now mainstream amongst scholars and politicians. How can we ensure that the poorest people on Earth are protected in the long term whilst we carry out our moral obligation to future generations? Pope Francis set the foundations for a spiritual revolution of climate and morality, preaching to almost 1.4 billion Catholics and almost 7 billion people identifying with a religious group. The conversation has grown, but actionable change still falls in the hands of politicians.

The views expressed in this article are the author's own and may not reflect the opinions of The St Andrews Economist.



Image credit: Paul Haring/CNS photo

Creativity & Innovation in the Age of AI





ART-IFICIAL INTELLIGENCE: A THREAT OR THE FUTURE?

By Isabella Checkley

Over the past decade, artificial intelligence (AI) has evolved from speculative novelty to a powerful creative engine. Whether generating artworks, composing music, editing films, or drafting novels, AI is now an active agent in cultural production. For some, this signals a creative renaissance; for others, an existential threat to originality. As AI becomes ever more present in the arts, the question emerges: is this the end of creativity or a new chapter?

The Last Ten Years: Creative Collaboration Meets Disruption

Throughout the 2020s, AI began integrating into creative workflows. Text-to-image generators, music composition tools, and scriptwriting assistants offered new ways for creatives to iterate, prototype, and experiment. Filmmakers explored AI for editing and dialogue generation. Designers used neural networks to build advertising visuals in seconds.

Writers leaned on large language models to overcome blocks or draft first passes.

AI didn't just increase productivity, it reshaped the relationship between artist and tool. Early adopters in advertising, fashion, gaming, and publishing used AI to amplify ideas, not replace them. Iterative feedback loops between human and machine introduced a new kind of co-authorship, where AI served as muse, assistant, and collaborator all at once.

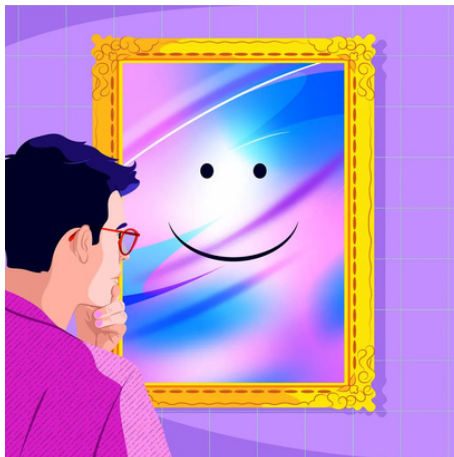


Image credit: Estudio Santa Rita/ BBC Future

Still, behind the excitement lurked growing discomfort. As AI systems trained on vast repositories of human-made content, questions arose: Who owns the output? What happens when training data includes copyrighted work? Could algorithms one day outpace or even wipe-out human creators?

These concerns weren't hypothetical. Emerging platforms began releasing fully AI-generated books, songs, and visual campaigns. Entry-level roles in design and copywriting came under pressure. Professional guilds warned of deskilling. By the mid-2020s, the creative sector found itself both enhanced and unsettled by its newest partner.

The Present: Productivity, Precarity, and a Shifting Cultural Economy

In 2025, AI sits at the heart of creative production. Tools are faster, cheaper, and more powerful than ever. One click now yields hundreds of polished design options, marketing slogans, musical arrangements, or story outlines. Automated editing and personalisation software are integrated into production pipelines across industries. Barriers to creation have collapsed.

Access, however, has not translated to security. Creative professionals increasingly face blurred credit, lower fees, and fierce competition from generative tools. Freelancers find their work replicated or undercut. Artists see their styles mimicked. Musicians hear deepfake voices of dead icons topping streaming charts.

As AI-generated work floods the market, distinguishing human from machine becomes harder - not just

technically, but aesthetically. The internet is saturated with content that's visually flawless, narratively competent, and emotionally resonant – but not necessarily authored by anyone.

Meanwhile, regulatory gaps widen. In some countries, AI firms are free to train on copyrighted materials without permission. Platforms increasingly prioritise scale over attribution. New models train on old models, amplifying bias and diluting originality. Labour protections lag behind.

Yet, amidst all this, artists still innovate. Creators repurpose AI as a medium-sampling, subverting, and sculpting its outputs. New genres emerge from the interplay between prompt and code, and some treat AI as the next camera or synthesiser: disruptive, yes, but ultimately just another tool.

The Next Ten Years: Tipping Points and Transformations

Looking ahead, the creative industries face a defining decade. Generative tools will become faster, more persuasive, and more autonomous. AI will not only assist in making art but begin to make creative decisions. It will refine aesthetics, predict preferences, and remix styles with minimal human input.

This opens space for innovation – and for loss. Human-made work may become rarer, more artisanal, or perhaps even niche. Platforms might shift toward AI-native ecosystems where content is endlessly generated, tailored, and optimised. Cultural production could become hyper-abundant but emotionally flat, algorithmically governed rather than artistically led

Alternatively, creators, audiences, and regulators could push back. Transparent training practices, ethical AI development, and watermarking could restore clarity and control. Copyright reform might protect the creative commons. A new emphasis on provenance and human storytelling could make authored work more valuable than ever.

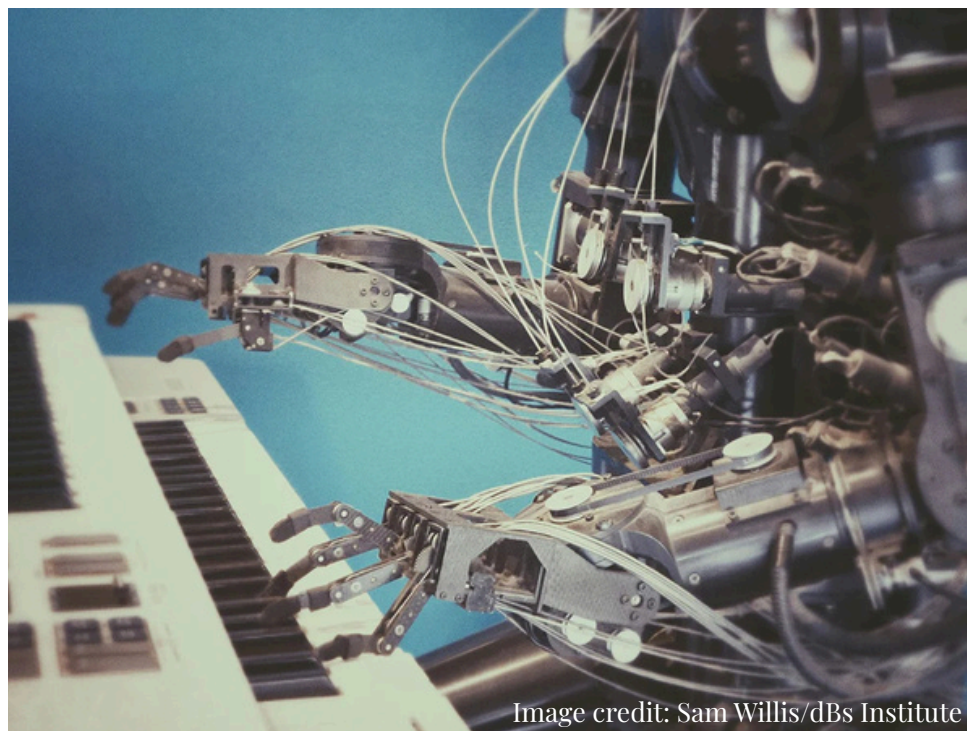
The creative workforce will also change. New roles will emerge – prompt designers, AI ethicists, dataset curators, hybrid collaborators. Education and training will need to evolve to support this shift, blurring lines between artist, technologist, and critic. Ultimately, whether AI is a threat or the future depends less on the technology itself and more on the choices we make around it.

AI is already transforming the creative industries. It enhances productivity, expands access, and opens new aesthetic frontiers. But it also challenges long-standing assumptions about originality, value, and labour.

Currently, we stand at a cultural inflection point. Will creativity become an algorithmic function, optimised and scaled for clicks? Or will human ingenuity adapt and reassert itself, not despite the machine – but through it?

The future of creativity lies in how we choose to use, regulate, and resist artificial intelligence. If wielded thoughtfully, AI could be one of the greatest tools artists have ever known. If not, it may render the very concept of authorship obsolete.

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As we close this edition, we want to extend our sincere thanks to all our contributors for their thoughtful, timely, and bold perspectives – and to you, our readers, for engaging with the questions that shape our world. Your curiosity and critical thinking are what keep this publication alive.

If you've found inspiration in these pages or feel you have something to add to the conversation, we'd love to hear from you. Whether you're a writer, designer, researcher, or simply passionate about global affairs, there's space here for your voice. Here's to more ideas, more questions, and many more editions to come.

-The Editors, *The St Andrews Economist*

economist@st-andrews.ac.uk

www.standrewseconomist.com



St Andrews Economist



@standrewseconomist