



Politics Review - May 2026

PolSoc will be re-launched after half term on Thursday Break!

What on earth is going on in the House of Commons?

Ed Bunting - A Labour Leadership Special

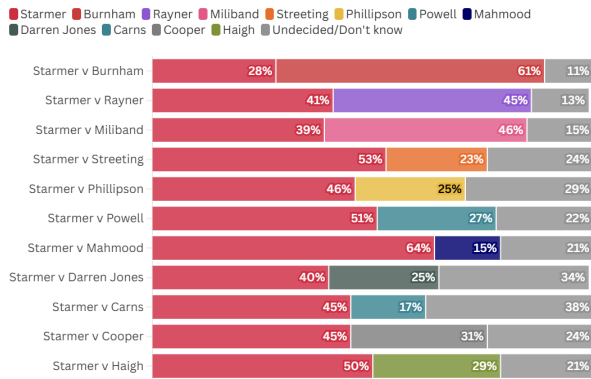
For those who are not clued up on politics, this has been a draining and exhausting week. At times, like Emily Charlton from the Devil Wears Prada, I am repeating 'I love my subject, I love my subject, I love my subject' (an albeit altered version) just to keep me from dying of exasperation. This is a soap opera worthy of a 7-book fantasy series. I encourage all readers to spare a thought for the Year 13s, whose first Politics exam is on Thursday, and they have to deal with a full-blown leadership crisis as they frantically plan essays. Good luck!

As the title says, based on the famous sound bite from 2024 - 'what on earth is going on in the House of Commons?' To sum up, after Labour's torrid local election results where they lost 1,493 councillors (for reference, a lot), Labour backbench MP Catherine West divulged that she would attempt to challenge Starmer for leadership. After his failed attempt to rouse the troops together for an incoming war (as famous historical figures Catherine of Aragon and Elizabeth I have done), speculation ensued about potential candidates who could resign to stand for leadership, as more and more MPs have called for him to go. On Thursday, the deadlock broke - Wes Streeting (a jumpscare on the right) officially resigned as Health Secretary, almost certainly indicating that he will try and get the 81 MPs required to challenge Keir Starmer, who has said he will fight any leadership election to come his way.



That evening, Andy Burnham, Mayor of Greater Manchester, announced his intention to stand in a by-election in the constituency of Makerfield after MP Josh Simons resigned to get Burnham into his seat - he is the rumoured top candidate, having stellar approval from Labour members (the potential voter base for any leadership election). As my friends put it, He has risen. And as a Burnhamite, I welcome this wholeheartedly.

Who would win against Starmer in head-to-head contest?



Base: All respondents. Unweighted total: 1,124

LABOUR SURVATION

The poll on the left shows Keir Starmer against different key Labour figures, and how they fare in a leadership contest. Starmer would be beaten by Andy Burnham, Angela Rayner, and Ed Miliband, all figures who would arguably steer the Labour Party leftward, but would notably crush Streeting. Rayner has said she would back Andy Burnham, and Ed Miliband has remained silent on the issue, but speculation is still rife. The voting body is the Labour membership - I would be able to vote, only among a select few who pay the party.

To the right are the key players, all looking rather exasperated: former Health Secretary Wes Streeting, Energy Secretary Ed Miliband, former Deputy PM Angela Rayner (recently cleared of tax dodging), and Mayor of Greater Manchester Andy Burnham.

What happens next? Andy Burnham has been allowed by Labour's NEC to stand. This is monumental - if Burnham could win this seat that is projected to be a Reform UK gain, it would definitely show his capabilities to be Prime Minister, firmly altering the political landscape.



It promises to be a whirlwind few weeks. By the time this article comes out, it will most likely be outdated. To quote F1 drivers Max Verstappen and Lando Norris after a race: 'Chaos?' A reporter posits. 'Chaos.' They reply. I want to say that Andy Burnham will be PM by the end of the year, and it might start to come true.

What's next for a not-so United Kingdom?

Adam Daowd

In 1995, Tony Blair's Shadow Secretary of State for Scotland and prominent Labour politician Lord George Robertson famously declared that "devolution will kill Nationalism stone dead." And yet, somehow, Westminster's worst nightmare has come back to life. In the 2026 Local Elections, British politics reached a tremendous, frightening milestone as all 3 of the Scottish, Welsh and Northern Irish parliaments will be led by a pro-independence First Minister. While SNP success was expected, the sudden rise in Plaid Cymru and the popularity of Sinn Fein has made uneasy ground under the stability of the Union as many across the country wonder about the future of the United Kingdom.



The Scottish Nationalist Party won 58 of the 129 seats in Holyrood, maintaining its position as the largest party in the Scottish Parliament. This is not new for the party; they have emerged as the largest party for 5 consecutive years elections, preserving their 19 year stronghold in Edinburgh. While at first glance it appears that Scottish independence has failed in winning a majority, this does not include the Scottish Greens who also seek separation from the Union, meaning that the Scottish Parliament is currently composed of 73 pro-independence MSPs from the possible 129. However, recent history suggests that relations between the 2 parties have permanently soured after previous First Minister Humza Yousaf terminated the Bute House Agreement, bringing an end to their power-sharing agreement and bringing into question how viable an agreement over Scottish Independence in the future would be. This is particularly detrimental considering many of the SNP's losses from 2021 translated into Green gains, with the former losing 6 MSPs and the latter winning 7 more MSPs. Furthermore, turnout for the elections in Scotland has decreased by 10.5% since the last election, reflecting that these electoral results may not be reflective of general sentiment about independence, as was seen in 2014 when the majority SNP government lost considerably in the referendum. Therefore, it is truly questionable whether these recent electoral results represent true Scottish desire for independence, and even whether this desire will translate into a referendum.

Plaid Cymru and Sinn Fein, on the other hand, have bucked trends with their electoral success, with both parties holding the most seats in their respective parliaments for the first time since Blair's constitutional reforms in 1998. The Welsh party managed to break Labour's 27 year grasp, indicating that Welsh voters are finally warming up to the idea of independence, as did Northern Irish voters when choosing to end the 19 year reign of the Democratic Unionist Party. Additionally, turnout in both the 2026 Welsh election and the 2022 Northern Irish election were historically high, reaching 52% and 64% respectively. Therefore, it seems pretty obvious that the two nations will soon be able to get the choice of leaving the Union through a referendum, as did Scots in 2014. Conversely, it is extremely difficult to predict the future of these nations based on one small sample.

Polling in Northern Ireland and Wales clearly demonstrates that independence does not have majority favourability, and neither do the parties. Plaid is 5 seats short of a majority at 43, and this is only supplemented by 2 further seats from the Welsh Greens. Similarly, power-sharing laws and the Single Transferable Vote system from the Good Friday Agreement ensures one party does not have majority rule in the Northern Ireland Assembly, promoting collaboration between unionist and nationalist factions. Northern Ireland's First Minister Michelle O'Neill only controls 27 of the 90 seats, rendering Northern Irish independence somewhat implausible.

So while it seems that these devolved elections threaten the very fabric of the Union, the danger is far more long-term than many would think. In running for the Senedd, Plaid Cymru made it clear that they would not seek independence in their first term, and in Scotland Swinney's explained a push would have to be legitimised by an SNP majority, meaning that, for now, neither party has the electoral mandate to push for self-determination. All 3 parties are also hindered by their proportional electoral systems and so have already struggled to form governments, as no party has a strong foothold in any of the devolved parliaments. And regardless of their devolved success, these governments would need the consent of Westminster as per a Supreme Court ruling in 2022.



Therefore, independence is dependent on Westminster's dependence on the two major parties - how far further will the UK's more radical parties rise. A major factor for remaining in the Union is the stability of the country's main parliament, but a Reform government could scare voters into independence. On the other side, Polanski's Greens are in favour of splitting the Union, giving the devolved bodies a path out of the UK.

So is "Nationalism" truly "stone dead"? Far from it. The promise of self-determination enticed many voters in the Local Elections this month and the same promise will continue to entice large numbers of voters for years to come. The real question is whether these parties can capitalise on this desire and accumulate just enough votes to push through their independence agenda.

Moon Joy, “For All Humanity”

Fred Britton

On Wednesday the 1st of April 2026, humans shot for the moon once again, for the first time in over half a century. Artemis II was the first crewed mission in the Artemis programme, sending four astronauts further than any others in history. Instead of landing, the astronauts looped around the Moon on a nine-day epic of a test flight, including multiple clogged toilets, the first instances of both “6-7” and Chappell Roan’s Pink Pony Club in space, the Worst Phone Call of All Time™ with a certain bright orange body with similar mass to Mars (albeit thankfully for the crew, not quite visible from space), an adorable plushie mascot named “Rise”, and a floating jar of Nutella. Just like the Apollo missions of 1969-1972, the Artemis programme has become a new lynchpin within the cultural zeitgeist, if not for the whole world then at least for the Western World and Anglosphere. This feeling was dubbed, by NASA, as Moon joy.

As with Apollo, the political forces surrounding Artemis have been mostly overlooked. Apollo was originally intended to have 20 missions, the scrapped 3 also planned to land on the Moon. These missions were cancelled after NASA suffered major budget cuts simply because (in the eyes of the US Government) there was no point. The Space Race had been won, the USSR had failed to land on the moon, and now their N1 rocket was cancelled after spending its whole career blowing up on the launch pad. Now, just as with Apollo, Artemis has a political goal.

On the 9th of March 2021, the People’s Republic of China and the Russian Federation signed a memorandum of understanding that set out their joint goal to construct an “International Lunar Research Station” either on the Moon’s surface or in its orbit. 33 weeks later, Artemis I (the uncrewed precursor to Artemis II) launched for a Moon orbit. Another Space Race is on, and once again it’s a battle of East Vs. West, freedom Vs subjection, democracy Vs. dictatorship. The West has come together to build SLS/Artemis, with JAXA providing the rover, and the European Space Agency contributing the European Service Module (ESM), which is the propulsion component for the Orion capsule when actually in space, a vital component of the Western space effort. This cumulative effort has created the single most advanced, most powerful, cleanest, safest heavy rocket in history.

On the other side, things are... different. From what I can tell, much like their military technology, both the Russian and Chinese governments are ignorantly, blissfully optimistic as to their respective countries’ actual capacity for safe lunar space travel. China’s space programme is significantly further advanced than the Russian one, having successfully returned a sample from Luna’s surface in 2020. Russia, on the other hand, hasn’t even managed the simple task of not smashing a probe (Luna 25) into the Moon and calling it a day. Whilst these are technological botches, that’s certainly not to say that the east may manage an effective Lunar programme eventually.

Whilst the Soyuz family of medium rockets, the regular platform for ISS resupply missions and crew transfers is certainly impressive, and the Chinese Tiangong Space Station (TSS) is a genuinely staggering piece of engineering, the Artemis II crew were over a thousand times further from Earth than these craft, all without dropping a Long March 2C SRB on one of their own villages. Regardless of the politicking, the world appears to have rallied around NASA's efforts to return to the lunar surface, with people previously uninterested in space, exploration, or the wider universe now getting involved. For me, the mission inspired me to dust off my Orion telescope for the first time in nearly a decade to once again gaze at the spectacular wonder of the Moon. This feeling of Moon joy has been reflected across the world, with the whimsically silly space simulation videogame Kerbal Space Program reaching its highest player count since its release all the way back in 2015. For much of the USA, the widespread feeling of Moon joy must be similar to how people across the UK felt upon seeing Helen Sharman reach space on TM-12 all the way back in 1991, or seeing Tim Peake fly to the ISS on TMA-19M in 2015. In Canada too, the sight of the maple leaf flag orbiting the moon has even the Québécois feeling patriotic. Overall, the Artemis II mission has shown us just how much humans can achieve when united, and how those achievements can unite us even further.

In conclusion, after fifty years and more, it's finally time for humanity to go lunar once again, spurred on by our species' insatiable curiosity and love of competition. Artemis, like Apollo, is a golden arrow pointing the next generation of explorers to the stars.

“We go for all humanity” - Jeremy Hansen, Artemis II

No New Wars

Aleeza Yahya

“We will measure our success not only by the battles we win but also by the wars that we end — and perhaps most importantly, the wars we never get into.”

That’s what Trump told his supporters at his election night victory speech in 2024. I think someone needs to remind him of his words - maybe he has forgotten. Because by that metric, he’s not been very successful.

Starting with Venezuela. Nicolás Maduro and his wife were kidnapped on January 3rd 2026 in the escalation of a pressure campaign that started with US military strikes of alleged drug trafficking boats in September 2025. They have been arraigned on charges of narco-terrorism to which they plead not guilty.

In reality, it's not about drugs. It is about oil.

Venezuela has the largest proven oil reserves in the world. Their 303 Billion barrels of heavy, sour crude oil is ideal for transportation fuel, so is understandably an asset. Billions of dollars have been invested in US oil refineries, with around 70% of refining capacity designed for the high viscosity oil that Venezuela has in droves.

The US has consistently made moves against Venezuelan sovereignty, with the first sanctions against Venezuela dating back to 2005. Economic pressure from America has crippled the Venezuelan oil industry. In 1990, they were producing 3.5 million barrels per day - by 2024 they were only producing 0.8 million.

These actions are not for the stated purpose of drugs and national security. It is blatant punishment for Venezuela entering bilateral trade agreements with China. They first signed major trade agreements in the early 2000s - coincidentally coinciding with the start of US sanctions. Venezuela has been able to leverage their oil wealth for heavy foreign investment from China, settling payments in dollar alternatives such as the Yuan. This is a direct threat to America. Venezuela is of large strategic importance and by selling oil in alternative currencies are undermining dollar hegemony.

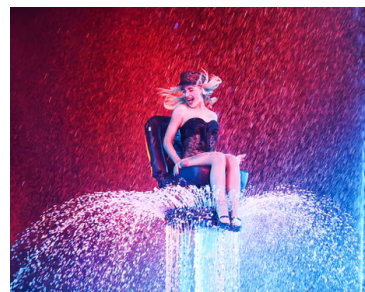
So when Trump is putting his finger in everyone else’s pie, remember that the reason you’ve been told isn’t the whole truth.

The Myth of the Pro-Palestine Popstar

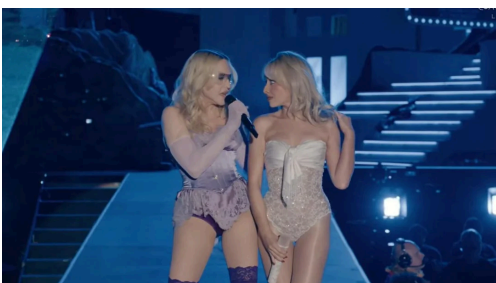
Ed Bunting

“What do you call it... stupid? Or is it... slow? Maybe it’s... useless?”

No, this isn’t an article about Zack Polanski or Nigel Farage. Or Wes Streeting. And this does link to a political point. For those who do not live under rocks, It’s a lyric from the 2025 hit ‘Manchild’ by Sabrina Carpenter, who headlined Coachella this April. If anyone saw clips of her performance, it is undeniable she put on a dazzling show - pulling out several stops - she had a new set for every song, such as skipping down a star-laden catwalk for a performance of ‘House Tour’. As pictured, sitting on an elevated car seat for ‘Tears’ to close her set. On the second weekend, she brought out pop royalty Madonna (pictured below) to debut a new song, and sing ‘Vogue’ and ‘Like a Prayer’, two of the greatest pop songs of all time, above Carpenter’s own classic ‘Espresso’. 10/10. Iconic. White gays were quaking around the globe. White gay Wes Streeting is quaking for a different reason, as seen on Thursday. Maybe Madonna caused this crisis. But how does this link to the conflict in the Middle East?



Some are desperate to call outrage to Carpenter, as she called a celebratory call known as a Zaghrouta ‘weird’ during a high-stakes performance, of something that many, including me, had not heard of before people with red triangles and hammers and sickles in the Twitter handle decided to call her xenophobic.



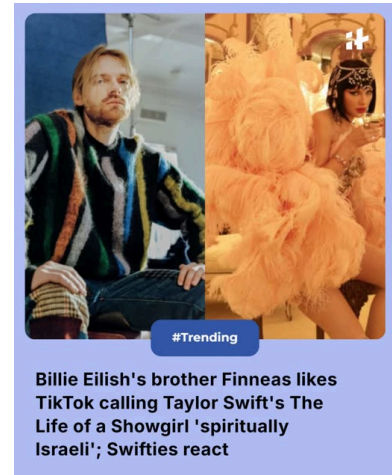
Most of the furore on pop stars stems from the Israel-Gaza conflict, which has been branded a genocide, quite rightfully. However, have people just taken a step back and thought ‘I don’t actually need to know the political opinion of every singer I like’ - can we as a society do that? I don’t care what politics my favourite singers have. Nobody should. Kanye West is one of the most loved world artists right now, even after releasing a song called ‘Heil Hitler’. Sabrina apologized for the Zaghrouta

incident, clarifying she ‘could have handled it better’, and has posted previously several donation links (especially for trans causes), along with stars such as Olivia Rodrigo, her long-term cultural rival. But people brand it as performative. Do some people really think a Taylor Swift Instagram story would cause Benjamin Netanyahu to have a complete moral shift and stop killing children? Swift herself has attended comedy nights where funds have gone to children in Palestine. Carpenter invited Susan Sarandon to her Coachella set as a special guest, who was blacklisted for speaking up about the Gaza genocide. Activism does not need to be performative at all, and is often best done in a private manner.

One must posit the question - why are people so enamoured in their favourite singer's political views? Because the politicians can't deliver. Especially around an issue such as the Gaza genocide, where the UK Government, contrary to TikTok belief, cannot in fact stop it with a simple 'stop the violence!' call. Nobody can, except perhaps Magic Grandad Jeremy Corbyn and his protégé Zarah Sultana, or at least that's what they'll have you believe. This extends to the Greens. Yes, Zack Polanski, we can solve the Russo-Ukrainian war and this genocide with peace negotiations, a little sitdown if you will! Because that will make Benjamin Netanyahu change his mind.

Does Zack Polanski want to gentle-parent a genocidal state?

Perhaps it is out of desperation that people turn to their favourite singers for political escapism, expecting them to be a beacon for their own views too. With Donald Trump in charge, the genocide shows no sign of stopping, with Benjamin Netanyahu dictating US foreign policy around the war in Iran. But it is obvious time people start actively making political moves around this issue, perhaps lobbying the government to make changes, or one's local MP, who undeniably has more impact politically than Taylor Swift. Things that the general public don't like musically are branded as pro-Israel. People are desperate to find cultural popstars that like and share their views, since any government is sensible enough to know nothing will change.



The Green Party and Your Party feed into this desperation by selling young people on the left false promises of world peace. After the local elections, the Green Party won control in Lewisham; their first aim is to twin with a Palestinian town to stop the genocide. As a sixth-form politician, this is sixth-form politics, meant in the most derogatory manner possible. Your job is to collect bins, not to solve genocide! Leave the false promises to the Reform UK councils...

Whilst I would love to believe that a Madonna and Sabrina Carpenter collaboration as seen at Coachella where the Queen of Pop crowns her heir would bring world peace, and let me say it obviously should, it is not that simple. The UK Government will never be able to exert any political impact on the Middle East, but there are sadly many who believe they can. It is merely a matter of morals where the UK stands, and to some that is very important, but politically Have a little bit of sympathy for our favourite toolmaker's son Keir Starmer. If he lasts. A two-state solution is all he can press for, but how realistic is that?

**Thanks to the Politics team - Ed, Adam, Aleeza, Fred, Owen, and Eleanor.
PolSoc is coming back on Thursday Break after May half term!**