## Adv 1

### AT: Circumvention

#### Sectoral bargaining reduces strikes and employer insecurity.

Keith Sisson 24 - Professor Emeritus at University of Warwick Business School. “Introducing sectoral bargaining in the United Kingdom: Why it makes sense and how it might be done,” November 2024, Industrial Relations Journal 55(6), pg. 446-471.

There are two very common misconceptions about collective bargaining needing to be corrected if the full potential of sectoral bargaining is to be appreciated. One is that it is the collective equivalent of individual bargaining. The other is that pay is its be-all and end-all. Neither do justice to the concept or the practice. As Flanders (1970a, p. 215) famously put it in describing the role of trade unions in promoting it, collective bargaining is essentially a rule making process—it's a form of joint regulation that stands comparison with legal regulation. Crucially, too, the rules aren't just concerned with pay,1 but also issues such as employee voice, training and development, and discipline and dismissal.

Stated in the simplest possible terms these rules provide protection, a shield, for their members. And they protect not only their material standards of living, but equally their security, status and self-respect; in short their dignity as human beings (Flanders, 1970b, p. 42).

As the following sections explain, although some of sectoral bargaining's benefits have long been appreciated, others have been acknowledged only recently. Also, it is international agencies like the OECD, which have been to the fore in doing so—organisations that in the past have been less than enthusiastic about the role of trade unions and collective bargaining reflecting the primacy accorded to markets and market-based policies. As the OECD's (2019a) ‘Negotiating our way up: Collective bargaining in the changing world of work’ most clearly shows, it seems that debates about economic performance, business strategy and inequality are changing minds: there is a return to the belief that institutions are also important and governments have a key role in shaping them. Reinforcing these views is appreciation of the role of collective bargaining and ‘social dialogue’ in handling the impact of the covid pandemic to be found in the OECD's (2020) ‘Global deal report, social dialogue, skills and Covid-19’.2

2.1 Sector agreements offer a flexible alternative to legal regulation

The underlying logic of sector agreements is that they establish a floor of minimum employment standards across an industry: the benefits of collective bargaining are not just the preserve of workers in larger companies, in other words, but in small and medium size enterprises (SMEs) as well. Perhaps the most celebrated expression is to be found in Winston Churchill's speech introducing Trade Boards (later to become ‘Wages Councils’) in 1909. As President of the Board of Trade at the time, his immediate aim was to establish a level playing field in the so-called ‘sweated trades’ characterised by poverty-level wages, excessive hours and unsafe workplace conditions. In referring to ‘healthy and unhealthy conditions of bargaining’, however, Churchill (1909) explains the essence of sectoral bargaining in inimitable words:

The first clear division which we make on the question to-day is between healthy and unhealthy conditions of bargaining. Where in the great staple trades in the country you have a powerful organisation on both sides, where you have responsible leaders able to bind their constituents to their decision, where that organisation is conjoint with an automatic scale of wages or arrangements for avoiding a deadlock by means of arbitration, there you have a healthy bargaining which increases the competitive power of the industry, enforces a progressive standard of life and the productive scale, and continually weaves capital and labour more closely together.3 But where you have what we call sweated trades, you have no organisation, no parity of bargaining, the good employer is undercut by the bad, and the bad employer is undercut by the worst; the worker, whose whole livelihood depends upon the industry, is undersold by the worker who only takes the trade up as a second string, his feebleness and ignorance generally renders the worker an easy prey to the tyranny; of the masters and middle-men, only a step higher up the ladder than the worker, and held in the same relentless grip of forces - where those conditions prevail you have not a condition of progress, but a condition of progressive degeneration.

There are two main reasons why joint self-regulatory mechanisms like collective bargaining are to be preferred to legal regulation. One, which will be expanded upon below, is that they encourage participation and involvement. Inasmuch as large numbers of people are typically involved in discussing and debating the possibilities, the outcomes enjoy greater legitimacy and commitment.

The second reason is their much greater ability to adapt regulation to circumstances. In the words of the OECD's (2019b) ‘Employment outlook facing the future of work: How to make the most of collective bargaining’, collective bargaining offers a ‘more flexible and pragmatic but fair manner than labour law’ for dealing with issues. It can help to adapt pay, working time and work organisation to new needs; deal with work–life balance and increased working time flexibility; and regulate the use of artificial intelligence, big data and electronic performance monitoring, as well as their implications for occupational health and safety, privacy, evaluation of work in performance and hiring and firing decisions.

Ironically, it might be added, the decline of sectoral bargaining in the United Kingdom did not give employers the flexibility that they might have expected. On the contrary. It has meant more ‘juridification’, that is, the greater involvement of the law and the courts in employment relations matters. In the absence of sector agreements, governments have had little option but to introduce legal rules to help deal with the risks and uncertainties that might otherwise result in conflict involving individuals and/or groups of workers. However, it is difficult to come up with top-down and one-size-fits-all solutions to the complexities involved in the employment relationship, let alone the complications that can arise in different sectors.

2.2 Sector agreements encourage participation and involvement

It has long been recognised that collective bargaining brings the opportunity for employee ‘voice’ in both making employment rules and administering them. From this involvement comes ownership and from ownership a measure of commitment.4 Not for nothing did many of the pioneers of employment relations study in the United Kingdom and the United States talk about ‘private systems of governance’, ‘industrial jurisprudence’, ‘industrial self-government’, ‘secondary systems of industrial citizenship’, ‘industrial democracy’ and the like.5

There is little doubt that most workers in the United Kingdom have lost out as a result of the decline of sectoral bargaining and the joint regulation it enables: below inflation pay rises and greater insecurity (arising particularly from uncontrolled outsourcing) are but two considerations. Less commented on, though, is that society at large is also suffering from the halving of trade union membership since the 1970s.6 Coats (2004, p. 11) puts the argument most forcibly in discussing the wider significance of employee ‘voice’. Democracy, he argues,

… is about more than periodic elections on a one-person-one-vote universal franchise … Citizenship has to be learned. It depends on discussion, debate, the assessment of alternative points of view, a democratic decision by majority vote and a willingness by the losers to live with the outcome.

Trade unions not only ensure an independent voice, in other words, but also an opportunity to be involved in the democratic processes of argument and voting. Coats' conclusion does not pull any punches: ‘If worker voice institutions are weak then the public domain is weakened. If the public domain is weakened then the quality of our democracy is diminished’. Similar arguments have been made more recently in the discussion and debate about the need for a new social contract in light of increasing concern about the rise in inequality discussed below.7

2.3 Sector agreements bring benefits to employers as well as trade unions

The historical role of sectoral bargaining in combating the rolling strike tactics of craft trade unions has already been touched on. Ongoing benefits of sectoral bargaining to employers are that it saves on the management costs of dealing with employment issues independently - in particular, businesses are able to avoid the time and potentially damaging conflict that can arise from distributional bargaining over pay. They also continue to make ‘undercutting’ and ‘poaching’ more difficult and investment in training more worthwhile. Mather (2014, p. 34) reports that the Scottish Government (2022) gives us a succinct up-to-date summary:

The benefits of a sector approach come from an ability to address challenges and determine strategies that affect all organisations and workers in a sector. They also come from an ability to determine agreed standards on pay, terms and conditions and other matters such as investment in training. A sector approach maximises efficiencies in the consultation and negotiation process and establishes a level playing field that marginalises firms seeking an advantage through ‘undercutting’ the competition - either by paying lower wages and offering poorer terms and conditions or poaching skilled workers from those who invest in workforce training.

One of the few surviving private sector multi-employer agreements in the UK offers a particular example of the role sector agreements can play. In the words of The National Agreement for the Engineering Construction Industry (2024):

The key objective of the NAECI is to continue to supply a modern, robust and ‘fit-for purpose’ national employment relations structure that:

(a)

enables United Kingdom engineering construction industry employers and clients to remain globally competitive;

(b)

provides attractive terms and conditions and greater security of employment for a competent, motivated, productive and competitive industry workforce and

(c)

establishes a sound foundation for further improvements to industry productivity, resourcing and employment relations, assuring global clients of the benefits of continuing to invest in United Kingdom projects and sites.8

Also not to be forgotten is that, because of its multi-employer coverage, sectoral bargaining doesn't just help to maintain the membership, status, and authority of trade unions (their ‘legitimacy power’).9 It does the same for employers' organisations. As well as enabling individual businesses also to have a collective ‘voice’, it gives employer's organisations a key intermediary role. Indeed, without them, meaningful communications between national policymakers and individual employers other than large companies is very difficult—arguably, another major gap in the UK's institutional policy-making framework and a contributing factor to its poor productivity record.

**1AR – !! – Secular Stagnation**

**Slow growth signals US weakness which triggers cyberattacks from Russia and China. That causes nuclear retaliation on both sides by threatening the integrity of nuclear arsenals, that’s Engelke and Burrows and Molini.**

**Empirics prove – Sino-American tensions escalated to an all-time high during the Depression.**

## AT: Movements

**1AR – !! – Climate**

**Climate change causes extinction.**

**1. Simultaneous risks. Even if knock-on effects are individually manageable, the nonlinear confluence of food insecurity, migration shocks, conflict, pathogens, extreme weather overcomes capacity for adaptation, that’s Richards.**

**2. Systemic. Undermines cooperation and institutions necessary to combat all other risks.**

**3. Interconnected. Globalization means regional effects cascade.**

**Turns [DA impact].**

**DA impact not systemic.**

**1AR – !! – Ecosystem Integrity**

**Biosphere integrity independently causes extinction. Species extinction collapse fish populations, vegetation, freshwater, and critical ecological systems. That causes global death spirals that produce self-perpetuating catastrophes.**

**Dropped collapse nuclear deterrence. Energy insecurity increases the probability false alarms are mistaken for emergencies, that’s Beard.**

**1AR – Supply Chain Disruptions**

**Workers check on bottlenecks & vulnerabilities. Push for changes that ensure each part of supply chain has what it needs, that’s Crawford.**

**1AR – !!d – sc Disruption**

**Shortages agro behavior instability. PRC invade. Past nation gone to war.**

## K

### Movements

#### 1. No movements. No coordination & it’s shut down with more repression.

Leo Casey 25, Executive Director Emeritus of the Albert Shanker Institute, and an Assistant to Randi Weingarten, President of the AFT, "Charting Labor's Path in Hard Times: A Call For Grounded Strategy," Convergence, 06/02/2025, https://convergencemag.com/articles/charting-labors-path-in-hard-times-a-call-for-grounded-strategy/

The romance of a general strike

The syndicalist idea of organizing a general strike has come up in left labor circles, as part of discussions of a proposal by Shawn Fain and the UAW. Fain wants unions to align contract expiration dates in 2028, with the objective of facilitating collaboration and creating synergy among different workplaces engaged in contract renewal fights. Organizing such an undertaking on the scale Fain envisions will be challenging, but to the extent that it can be accomplished, it would be a positive development that can build cross-union solidarity. But vaulting from solidarity in cross-union contract fights to a general strike is a different matter.

Historically, the idea of a general strike loomed large in the political imaginations of revolutionary syndicalists such as the Wobblies: it functioned as a trope for their vision of ending the system of “wage slavery” and removing themselves from the existing economic and political order. Georges Sorel, the preeminent theorist of syndicalism who was read among the Wobblies, described the general strike as the vehicle for achieving total, revolutionary change: it would put “the forces of production in the hands of free men, i.e., men who are capable of running the workshop created by capitalism without any need for masters.” Since the struggle for the political power to govern was not addressed by syndicalists such as Sorel, the actual mechanisms for accomplishing this radical transformation were undefined, even mysterious.

Indeed, Sorel would insist that the general strike was not just a literal action, but also a “myth” that animated a grand historical drama of working-class salvation; he compared it to the idea of the Second Coming of Christ, which he saw as the organizing myth of the early Christian church. It was a fitting analogy, because the syndicalist idea of a general strike is embedded in a millenarian approach to politics: the strike is understood as an instrument of revolutionary transcendence which allows the workers who wield it to escape their moment in history, with all of its contradictions and limitations, and usher in a completely new world. Today, advocating for a general strike as an effective way to counter Trumpian authoritarianism requires a leap of syndicalist faith.

The historical reality of general strikes in the US cannot sustain this faith. In close to 200 years of American unionism, there have only been three significant general strikes, all citywide (in Seattle, San Francisco, and Minneapolis); the last of them was in 1934. These strikes were called not to fulfill syndicalist dreams of radical transformation, but in reaction to government repression of private sector strikes; both the San Francisco and Minneapolis general strikes were called after local police attempted to violently crush a strike, firing on workers and killing a number of them.

There has never been a nationwide, political general strike in US, much less one announced four years in advance. Nothing in our history suggests that a general strike along such lines is feasible. A successful general strike that is both national and political in character would require political preparations that have not been undertaken, such as millions of people in the streets in protests, and a most serious and grave casus belli that could only be addressed through such an action: if the January 6th insurrection had been successful in preventing the certification of the 2020 election and the peaceful transfer of power, one could conceive of a necessary and efficacious general strike around the single demand of accepting the election results and installing in office the choice of the voters. Barring such groundwork and extraordinary circumstances, it is little more than a pipedream.

Embarking on such an adventure with unclear objectives and vague justifications would be a political gift to the neo-fascists, allowing them to portray unions in the most negative terms as forces of chaos that were seeking to overthrow a democratically elected government. It would be a ready-made justification for undertaking repressive measures, with unions as the primary target. It would almost certainly damage the Democratic Party candidates in the 2028 elections, and in all likelihood, ensure the re-election of a MAGA Republican ticket. election of a MAGA Republican ticket.

#### 2. Thumped. Trump triggers labor federalism now.

#### 3. Turn. Labor movements are gaining momentum now. Scrapping the NLRB kills it.

Glass '24 – Policy Analyst for the Inclusive Economy. (Aurelia Glass. (6-20-2024). "Project 2025 Would Undo the NLRB's Progress on Protecting Workers' Right to Organize." Center for American Progress. https://www.americanprogress.org/article/project-2025-would-undo-the-nlrbs-progress-on-protecting-workers-right-to-organize/; Neo)

As autoworkers, baristas, package carriers, Hollywood writers and actors, and thousands of other workers fight for and win new unions and new union contracts, Biden administration appointees to the nation’s front-line labor law enforcement agency—the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB)—are helping prevent anti-union employers from undermining worker organizing. Workers in the United States face an uphill battle in their fight to unionize and bargain, as broken federal labor laws and rampant lawbreaking undermine their efforts, but workers today are organizing and winning union elections at a growing rate.

New analysis from the Center for American Progress shows that the NLRB is helping ensure that workers can exercise their legal right to come together in unions, with more workers winning their elections and more workers getting help to get back on the job when fired illegally for protected organizing activity. However, these gains are under threat from The Heritage Foundation’s Project 2025—a playbook with strategies for eroding checks and balances across the government that offers instructions for gutting the NLRB’s enforcement capacity. This would threaten workers’ ability to come together in unions to bargain for better wages and working conditions.

According to CAP analysis of NLRB elections data, workers today have a better chance of winning their union representation election than at any point in the past 15 years, with a win rate of more than 70 percent. After a decline in the number of elections under the Trump administration, workers are back to holding more than 1,700 elections for union representation every year, and 115,000 workers voted in union elections in 2023, the largest number in a decade. As workers have pushed to form new unions, the NLRB has pursued a vigorous agenda of going after lawbreakers: It has won 54 percent more reinstatement offers for illegally fired workers since 2021 than during all four years of the previous administration, while instituting new rules that make it easier for workers to exercise their right to join a union.

The trend for the past several decades has been a weakening of labor law, stacking the deck in favor of corporations trying to bust unions. Businesses can use a range of legal tactics to persuade workers to vote against unionizing, and can even resort to illegally firing workers who try to organize their colleagues, since monetary penalties for breaking the law are nonexistent. Corporations are served by a cottage industry of professional “union avoidance” consultants, with law firms and consultants charging top dollar. One boutique consultant offers to potential clients to “show you how not only to win your election but also teach your staff advanced techniques for union avoidance to ensure your company never goes through a union election again.” And the Project 2025 policy playbook offers instructions for future administrations to neuter the NLRB’s enforcement capacity and turn it against unions by firing key agency leaders, making it easier to decertify unions, and closing off established ways of forming unions. However, under the leadership of Biden administration appointees, the NLRB has taken steps to advance, rather than stop, worker organizing. The NLRB is developing new rules that make it easier to form a union and win a contract, while actively protecting workers trying to organize.

In 2023, the union win rate in NLRB elections broke 70 percent for the first time in 15 years. As shown in Figure 1, the percentage of elections in which workers voted for a union in NLRB-overseen representation elections has generally been around 64 percent since 2008. The rate has climbed from 65.2 percent in 2020 to 72.1 percent in 2023 and 73.8 percent so far in 2024, meaning that workers filing for a union election today are winning a greater percentage of elections than at any point since 2009.

The win rate has been consistently higher under the Biden administration than under the previous administration. As shown in Figure 2, while workers won 66.1 percent of their union elections from 2017 to 2020, workers have won 70.3 percent of all elections since 2021.

Not only are workers more likely to win their union election, but there are also more elections today than at any time since 2015. Figure 3 shows how the number of union representation elections decreased from 2017 to 2020; however, in the past two years, the number of elections held each year shot up past prepandemic levels, reaching 1,777 total elections in 2023.

The means that more workers are participating in union elections, with 2023 marking the first year in which more than 100,000 workers voted in a union election since 2017. Although the number of workers voting in representation elections began trending down in 2017 and reached a low of 59,763 during the COVID-19 pandemic in 2021, the number of workers who voted in a representation election reached 115,472 in 2023—a 10-year high and a 93 percent increase since the Biden administration took office in 2021. During this same year, workers participated in some of the largest labor actions in recent decades: 60,000 workers in the Screen Actors Guild-American Federation of Television and Radio Artists (SAG-AFTRA) went on strike in the summer; 46,000 members of United Auto Workers (UAW) went on strike at Ford, Stellantis, and General Motors to achieve their new contract; and 300,000 Teamsters were covered by a new United Parcel Service (UPS) contract.

The number of workers participating in union elections has increased as the NLRB has expanded the range of workers eligible to join a union. During the previous administration, the NLRB nearly succeeded in finalizing a rule that would have prevented student workers at private colleges and universities from unionizing. The NLRB withdrew the rule during the Biden administration—and a recent report from the Economic Policy Institute found that since 2022, nearly 45,000 student workers at private colleges and universities have unionized. The NLRB also changed a standard from 2019 that allowed many workers to be classified as independent contractors—who are unable to unionize—rather than as regular employees. The antiworker Project 2025 advises undoing this change, which would harm workers’ ability to come together in unions.

#### 4. Labor federalism is worse. Causes a race to the bottom.

MacDonald '25 – Employment and Labor Law Advisor, Co-chair of the WPI. (Alexander T. MacDonald. (06-02-2025). "Be Careful What You Wish For: The Risks of Competitive Labor Federalism for Pro-Union States". The Federalist Society. https://fedsoc.org/commentary/fedsoc-blog/be-careful-what-you-wish-for-the-risks-of-competitive-labor-federalism-for-pro-union-states; Neo)

Unions have therefore pushed state lawmakers to test the NLRA’s limits. For example, they’ve lobbied blue states to require “labor peace” agreements in select industries, like the cannabis industry. They have also lobbied states to ban “captive audience” meetings—a particularly effective tool employers use to get their message out during union campaigns. And most recently, with California’s AB 288, they have pushed lawmakers to transfer much administrative authority to state officials. If passed, AB 288 would give a California agency authority to conduct union elections, decide unfair labor practices, and police collective bargaining. It would, in effect, transform labor policy into a state-level concern.

Under the traditional view, all of these laws would be preempted. They all deal with matters regulated by the NLRA and overseen by the Board. They involve union organizing, the treatment of union supporters, and bargaining with union representatives. They are not just “arguably” under the Board’s jurisdiction; they sit at the core of Board’s administrative responsibility.

Yet states have begun to argue that the traditional view—the one set out in Garmon—is perhaps wrong. For one, the NLRA itself doesn’t mention preemption. So maybe we’ve been reading the statute wrong all this time. Besides, even if we have been reading it correctly, Garmon presupposed a functioning Board. But today, the Board cannot function. It currently lacks a quorum, which leaves it legally inert. And in fact, even when the Board had a quorum, it had increasingly shown itself too slow and too weak to protect workers’ rights. So Garmon’s premises have been eroded on the ground, leaving a space for the states to step in.

A Race to the Bottom—and to the Top

That view is almost certainly wrong. To start, it treats preemption doctrine like a light switch, toggling on or off depending on how many seats are filled at the Board. But preemption doesn’t work like that; it displaces state policy regardless of the operative status of one federal agency at one moment in time. Nor does preemption depend on whether a state agrees with federal law. States cannot opt out of a federal law just because they think the law doesn’t go far enough. If they could, preemption would be effectively meaningless: states could adopt their own policies whenever they disagreed with the federal solution.

Assume, however, that these states have it right. Let’s say that a state could opt out of the NLRA whenever it thought the Board was failing to protect worker rights. Even if true, that principle would not solve organized labor’s woes. To the contrary, it would probably make them worse.

The reason is competitive federalism. Competitive federalism means that when states have leeway to set their own policies, they can compete with one another for business. A state can experiment with taxes, regulations, and subsidies to attract new residents and investments. The state that finds the best policy mix becomes a magnet for people and companies. The state with the worst mix becomes a desert.

Today, competitive federalism is often tempered by federal law, which sets minimum standards in some policy arenas. States can’t fully compete in those arenas because the most important rules are set at the national level. One such arena used to be labor policy. But if California is right that states can adopt their own labor rules, then the doors to competition are now open. And they are open not only for pro-labor blue states, but also for more conservative states with dimmer views of organized labor.

It’s not difficult to predict how the resulting competition would play out. We already have decades of evidence under “right to work” laws. Whether to adopt right-to-work laws is one of the few choices left to states under the NLRA. The NLRA explicitly allows states to decide whether to let unions to bargain for “agency” fees. Agency fees are the fees that non-member employees pay to a union for the union’s bargaining services. Those fees are controversial, and today, more than half the states have banned them.

The results of those bans are unmistakable. Multiple studies have shown that right-to-work laws not only boost overall employment, but also increase real wages. By one count, employment growth in right-to-work states has been more than twice as fast as in their non-right-to-work counterparts. Real wages have been higher too—as much as $2,900 per person in 2023. And the share of manufacturing employment has been significantly higher—by some estimates, nearly 30%.

More broadly, heavily unionized states have performed poorly in the national competition for people. In 2024, the states with the highest union densities were Hawaii (26.5%), New York (20.6%), Alaska (19.5%), and California (16.3%). But the same year, those states lost more residents than any others. Among the biggest gainers of residents were the states with the lowest union densities—North Carolina (2.4%) and South Carolina (2.7%). In fact, the five states with the biggest population increases from domestic migration all had below-average unionization rates. And all but Delaware had a right-to-work law.

Those numbers are daunting for the supporters of independent state labor policies. These supporters tend to be pro-labor advocates who want to strengthen union rights. But the numbers say that pro-union laws chase jobs into other jurisdictions. That leakage is already happening; businesses have been fleeing New York and California for years. And those states are unlikely to stem the tide by making their laws even less friendly to businesses.

Indeed, other states will no doubt seize the same opportunity to make their own laws even less union friendly. If businesses were already eager to decamp for Texas, one can only imagine their excitement when Texas bans card checks and dues checkoffs. The lesson for pro-union states is clear: be careful what you wish for.

#### 5. It fails. Silos organizing & increases inter-worker fights.

Gordon '23 – Professor of History @ University of Iowa, Author of "Citizen Brown: Race, Democracy, and Inequality in the St. Louis Suburbs". (Colin Gordon. (12-26-2023). "Federalism Has Been a Disaster for the Working Class". Jacobin. https://jacobin.com/2023/12/federalism-disaster-labor-states-rights-racism-democracy; Neo)

Consider labor law and policy. As democratic capitalism tends to generalize the interests of capital (what’s good for General Motors, et cetera), it also minimizes or undermines the interests of working people. This is true within states, where the disproportionate political clout of employers has yielded a long and dismal history of anti-labor repression and violence. And it is true across states, where labor laws and labor standards vary dramatically by region and jurisdiction. Fragmented organization and regulation nurtured divisions among workers (most starkly along racial lines) and wide state-to-state and regional disparities in the social wage. The uniform, expansive, and national right to collective bargaining in the United States lasted barely a decade — from the passage of the Wagner Act in 1935 (which was explicitly designed to erase regional disparities in labor law and policy) to the passage of Taft-Hartley in 1947 — which invited states to check worker power in the private sector by passing “right-to-work” laws. Right-to-work regimes, in turn, have dampened wages, slowed new organizing, and yielded wide regional and state gaps in union membership: private sector union density today ranges from 1.4 percent (South Carolina) to 14.1 percent (Hawaii). Public sector labor law enjoyed no flirtation with national standards and remained firmly rooted in the states, where disparate laws have also yielded disparate protection: public sector union density in the states ranges from 6.7 percent (South Carolina again) to 68.4 percent (Connecticut).

Without a strong labor voice in politics, fragmented anti-statism prevails, the basic elements of social protection wither, and the political and economic gaps between the ruling class and everyone else widen.

Federalism fractures not just the regulation of labor relations but the organization, structure, and solidarity of the labor movement itself. The exceptional and debilitating fragmentation of the American labor movement rests in large part on its roots in disparate state settings and on the absence of any sustained peak bargaining — both consequences of federated politics. Jurisdictional silos of solidarity, as Joel Rogers has argued, have invited calculated division, often pitting workers and their organizations against each other. The class bias of American federalism, in turn, has sustained an unrelenting regime of authoritarian rule in American workplaces, simultaneously exploiting workers and heightening the risk of pushing back. “Most workplace governments in the United States are dictatorships,” Elizabeth Anderson notes, “in which bosses govern in ways that are largely unaccountable to those who are governed. They don’t merely govern workers; they dominate them.” And the damage done at work spills into public life. Federalism weakens union power and voice at the bargaining table and in politics, a fact explicitly recognized and exploited by the attack on public sector unions in recent years. Without a strong labor voice in politics, fragmented anti-statism prevails, the basic elements of social protection wither, and the political and economic gaps between the ruling class and everyone else widen.

**AT: Midterms DA**

**1AR Populist Voters**

**1AR – O/V**

1. **WW3 outweighs on magnitude – Trump lashout escalates flashpoints in Taiwan, Eastern Europe, and the Middle East. Structurally more likely and turns the DA because midterm loss causes him to do “everything possible” to distract the public – that’s Kilgore & Panetta.**
2. **Turn outweighs on time frame – he’ll destroy the world in the lame-duck.**

Satoshi **Machidori 25**, Professor of Political Science at Kyoto University's Graduate School of Law, specializing in Comparative Political Studies, "American democracy will weather the Trumpist storm," Institute of Geoeconomics, 3/4/25, https://instituteofgeoeconomics.org/en/research/2025030404/

The key is that Trump’s presidency is constitutionally limited to four years. If it enters a lame-duck phase after the midterms, as is likely, the administration might prioritize cementing its legacy by embarking on disruptive international and security-related policies, potentially undermining global trust in U.S. democracy and stability.

1. **Specifically, he’ll distract by invading Mexico.**

Kevin **Maurer &** Asawin **Suebsaeng 25** – “Team Trump Is Actually Drawing Up Attack Plans for Mexico,” 8/15, https://www.rollingstone.com/politics/politics-features/team-trump-mexico-cartels-military-attack-plans-1235407875

A new directive signed last week by President Donald Trump gives the Pentagon authorization to use military force against Latin American drug cartels designated as terrorist organizations, according to administration sources.

A U.S. official familiar with the matter confirmed to Rolling Stone certain details regarding the Trump-signed directive, which was first reported by The New York Times. Other knowledgeable sources, working in or close to this iteration of the Trump White House, say that unless Mexico gives Trump what he wants, this administration is serious about attacking its neighbor to the south. And according to administration officials and others familiar with the Trump administration preparations, it’s not a bluff: This American president wants to violently breach Mexico’s sovereignty — if and when he feels like it. He, after all, effectively campaigned on doing so during his 2024 bid.

Just don’t call any of this a plan for an invasion, U.S. government officials implore.

Speaking about the new directive, a senior administration official says, “It’s not a negotiating tactic. It’s not Art of the Deal. The president has been clear that a strike … is coming unless we see some big, major changes.”

Indeed, this seems less like a negotiating tactic and more like a Mafia-style intimidation campaign, with the supposed goal of extorting the Mexican government into miraculously solving America’s fentanyl crisis. But that doesn’t make the threat to Mexico’s sovereignty any less real.

In response to Trump’s directive to target drug cartels, Mexico President Claudia Sheinbaum last week rejected the use of U.S. military forces in Mexico. But earlier this week, Mexico extradited 26 alleged cartel members to the United States in a move hailed by Attorney General Pam Bondi as part of the Trump administration’s “historic efforts to dismantle cartels and foreign terrorist organizations.” The fugitives face a variety of federal and state charges, including drug trafficking, kidnapping, murder, and money laundering. Among those apprehended are leaders from major drug cartels, including the Jalisco New Generation cartel (CJNG).

A similar transfer occurred in February, when 29 cartel members were sent to the United States by the Mexican government. Both transfers came in the wake of saber-rattling by the Trump administration. The moves, according to experts tracking cartel operations, are an attempt to stave off U.S. military intervention and preserve ongoing trade negotiations.

For years, Trump and other leaders in the Republican Party have openly threatened Mexico with an American invasion, citing the fentanyl crisis and drug cartels as a justification. The GOP and its leader are not shy about this: They openly talk about it and embrace it as if it’s sound policy.

At a December event held at Harvard University to discuss the 2024 election, Rolling Stone asked several Trump lieutenants why the then-president-elect and other Republicans kept talking so much about invading Mexico. James Blair, now a White House deputy chief of staff, replied with a straight face that candidate Trump “never” proposed invading Mexico. (As recently as late January, the president told reporters that he absolutely was not taking the possibility of sending U.S. special ops into Mexico off the table. “Could happen,” he said, adding that “stranger things have happened.”)

The administration took a first step in January, when the State Department declared eight cartels — the Sinaloa cartel, CJNG, the Northeast cartel, the Michoacán family, the United Cartels, and the Gulf Cartel — to be foreign terrorist organizations. The Salvadoran MS-13 and the Venezuelan Tren de Aragua gang were also on the list. This designation triggers U.S. sanctions, including asset freezes, restrictions on financial transactions, and prohibitions on U.S. citizens and organizations providing support. But Geoffrey Corn, director of the Center for Military Law and Policy at Texas Tech University School of Law, says the terror designations don’t authorize the use of force.

“You have to make a credible argument that the U.S. faces an armed attack,” says Corn, a retired U.S. Army judge advocate officer who served as the Army’s senior law of war adviser. “This characterization that we’re under attack by these cartels is essential to using the president’s war powers.” (The terror designations also provided the justification to ship hundreds of Venezuelan migrants to a notorious mega-prison in El Salvador.)

He argues that the Trump administration has characterized migration as an invasion, so it isn’t a stretch to think they’d consider the shipment of drugs as an attack. Corn admits he could craft an argument that drugs are an attack, Mexico is unable to prevent use of its territory for this attack, and special operations raids are thus a proportional response. But is that a viable policy? America tried to shoot its way out of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan with disastrous effects.

“It is really easy to get the United States into a war and very hard to get us out,” Corn tells Rolling Stone, adding that there is little to check military adventurism after the attacks on Sept. 11. “It’s gotten too easy to go to war.”

And Trump, despite campaigning as a peace president, seems eager to rely on the military as his hammer, deploying troops to Los Angeles to quell protests against immigration raids and now to Washington, D.C., after a group of teens allegedly beat up a Trump administration staffer known as “Big Balls.”

“When your only tool is a hammer, then everything looks like a nail,” Corn says.

Rolling Stone reported in November that Trump’s incoming administration was considering a “soft invasion” of Mexico, in which American special operations would be sent covertly to assassinate cartel leaders. Potential plans on the table at the time included everything from drone strikes and commando raids, airstrikes on cartel infrastructure or drug labs, sending in military trainers and “advisers,” and waging cyber warfare against drug lords and their networks.

But a former intelligence officer who’s been tracking the issue says the new Trump directive is bigger than just the Mexican cartels. The focus is on interrupting cartel operations throughout the region. Before the terror announcement, the U.S. military and CIA were already increasing surveillance flights of Mexican drug cartels. The drone flights are part of the ongoing blitz of surveillance flights likely intercepting and decrypting cell phone signals near the southern border.

U.S. officials say since Trump was sworn back into office in January, there have been multiple Pentagon, White House, and intelligence-strategy meetings on how to use the American military for cartel operations, and that the president and some of his top advisers have personally demanded items like target lists for potential drone strikes on Mexican territory. A Defense Department source says units at Fort Bragg are preparing target packages. The source declined to share which unit or who the targets might be, but the North Carolina post is home to both the Army Special Operations Command and the Joint Special Operations Command, which oversees Delta Force and Seal Team Six.

A federal agent working on the southern border says there has been an “extreme refocusing” on cartel operations in the past few months. In the blood sport of interagency cooperation, the agent says there was a real sense of cooperation, including intelligence sharing with agencies usually focused on external threats.

If, or when, Trump decides to blow something up in Mexico, he will be presented with an already prepared menu of options, sources say, which would include possible targets like high-profile cartel hubs or leadership hideouts, or drug-making facilities, as identified by American intelligence gathering. Stefano Ritondale, a former Army intelligence officer who uses the handle All Source News on X, says if the Trump administration does act, the target will likely be big and symbolic.

“Why piss off the Mexican government for a chemist or arms dealer or money launderer?” says Ritondale, who also works as chief intelligence officer for Artorias, a private intelligence and data analysis company.

In such a scenario, the president, according to those who’ve spoken to him about this, would want a target deemed important enough to drug-lord operations that he could go on TV to make a national address and tout the historic nature of the military operation, as he did with the death of ISIS leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi.

If Ritondale was betting, his money is on Nemesio Oseguera, also known as El Mencho, the leader of CJNG. The U.S. government has offered a reward of $10 million for information leading to his arrest, one of the highest bounties ever offered.

“El Mencho is the only person worth doing it,” he says.

One of the six designated cartels, CJNG, is considered by the Mexican government to be the most powerful drug cartel in Mexico. With assets estimated at $20 billion, CJNG generates revenue from drugs like fentanyl and cocaine as well as extorting the tortilla, avocado, lime, and chicken industries. Fuel theft and counterfeit timeshare dealing also provide a revenue stream. On Wednesday, the U.S. Treasury’s Office of Foreign Assets Control sanctioned four individuals and 13 companies in Mexico for timeshare fraud orchestrated by the CJNG.

Another target might be Iván Archivaldo Guzmán Salazar, a key leader within Los Chapitos. Known as “El Chapito,” the faction’s primary business is international drug trafficking, and it has dominated smuggling fentanyl into the United States.

“The narcos are paying attention,” says Mica Treviño, who runs CartelInsider.com, a website dedicated to researching the cartels. “For now, their focus is still on their rivals. Even so, nobody’s missing the fact that the U.S. is circling overhead, watching every move.”

A strike against a cartel leader would likely do little to accomplish the mission of stopping the flow of drugs across the southern border. Carolyn Gallaher, a professor studying guerrilla and paramilitary violence at American University’s School of International Service, told Rolling Stone in January that a campaign to decapitate the cartels would only create a succession crisis that would be settled with violence, and would ultimately do little to accomplish the administration’s goals of stemming the flow of drugs. This sentiment is echoed by the agent near the border.

1. **Mexican invasion causes cascading global conflict.**

Kevin **Celestino &** Omar **González 25** – LSE Fellow in the Department of Social Policy, Lecturer in International Relations at Centro de Investigación y Docencia Económica, “Why a US Invasion of Mexico would end in disaster,” 3/25, https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/usappblog/2025/03/25/why-a-us-invasion-of-mexico-would-end-in-disaster

Donald Trump’s second administration has shown a willingness to cross previously unthinkable lines in foreign and diplomatic affairs, including turning its back on long-standing US allies amid major geopolitical events. For instance, the US has taken a radical stance on Ukraine, calling into question its role as Europe’s primary military ally and significantly weakening the North-Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). Likewise, the White House has recently escalated economic tensions by engaging in a tariff war against Canada and the European Union.

Military action against Mexico appears to be a real US option

In the same vein, Trump’s administration has placed Mexico in an unwarranted position. Ahead of Trump’s inauguration some of his allies explicitly suggested military action on Mexican soil to combat drug cartels, particularly in response to fentanyl trafficking. This discourse has gained traction following the designation of certain Mexican cartels as Foreign Terrorist Organizations (FTOs). Such a designation would set a legal precedent for unilateral military action, which would be a blatant violation of Mexico’s sovereignty. Amid the thunderous start of the second Trump administration, the debate in some policy circles is no longer whether the US would intervene in Mexico, but rather what form such an intervention might take.

While some statements from high-ranking officials suggest that any “intervention” could be more nuanced than initially expected, it would not be far-fetched to speculate that significant military action remains a real option on the table, given Trump’s unpredictable and confrontational attitude. It is therefore crucial to explore what a potential US military incursion into Mexico would mean not only for bilateral relations but for regional stability and the broader implications of such a move. Based on US history and socio-political reality in Mexico, we would anticipate that an incursion of this kind would backfire spectacularly for US national interests.

Interventions are costly and Mexico would be no exception

From an historical perspective, US military interventions in foreign nations – whether in Vietnam, Iraq, or Afghanistan – have often resulted in costly failures, in terms of budget, lives lost and the (lack of) long-term strategic benefits. And it wouldn’t the first time that the US has intervened in Mexico with marginal results. The 1916 Punitive Expedition to capture revolutionary warlord Francisco Villa, after Villa’s attack on Columbus, New Mexico, not only failed but inadvertently turned Villa into a folk hero who symbolized defiance against American aggression and evoked strong nationalist sentiments in Mexico.

From a political viewpoint, a US incursion into Mexico would inflame these very same nationalist sentiments, strengthening rather than weakening the so-called “Fourth Transformation” regime led by President Claudia Sheinbaum. The US seems to underestimate the unifying power of Mexican nationalism in the face of perceived foreign threats. Such an operation would reinforce Mexico’s long-standing narrative of sovereignty against foreign intervention, making it even harder for Washington to exert influence over Mexico’s leadership. Instead of curbing cartels, military intervention would likely legitimize the Mexican government’s resistance to US pressures and bolster anti-American rhetoric, the crucial cornerstone of Mexican governability after Mexico’s revolution of 1910.

From a diplomatic standpoint, a military operation in Mexico would further erode US credibility in Latin America and beyond. Washington’s historical influence in the region has already been challenged by emerging global powers, and direct military action would accelerate regional realignments away from US strategic interests. Moreover, US military intervention in Mexico would likely terminate existing bilateral security cooperation agreements, such as intelligence-sharing initiatives that facilitate the targeting of high-profile cartel figures. Rather than weakening transnational criminal organizations, the erosion of US-Mexico collaboration would hinder law enforcement efforts on both sides of the border.

It would also generate widespread instability just south of the border, exacerbating violence across the country. Historically, large-scale military operations have led to power vacuums, triggering internal cartel conflicts and escalating brutality as rival groups fight for territorial control. Such instability would have severe economic repercussions, particularly in sectors deeply embedded in US supply chains. Industries such as automotive manufacturing, agriculture, and electronics, all of which rely on stable production and cross-border trade, would suffer significant disruptions, ultimately harming both the Mexican and US economies. Being both countries’ each other’s main trade partners, the major implications of disrupting this fragile stability in an asymmetric interdependency, are hard to quantify.

How US intervention In Mexico could backfire on the US

From a social perspective, the situation is even more complex. Many cartels and criminal organizations in Mexico have deep-rooted ties to local communities through a form of ‘clandestine welfare,’ providing jobs, security, and services where the state has failed. In some regions, these groups function as de facto parallel governments with substantial local support. Any US military action would not only have to contend with these well-armed groups but also face stiff resistance from the very communities that rely on them.

In the worst case scenario, military intervention could unintentionally transform cartels and other criminal organizations into symbols of resistance, “heroes” and “martyrs” in the eyes of many vulnerable communities. Rather than being seen as liberators, US forces would likely be perceived as aggressors imposing an external agenda, further alienating local populations. Thus, strengthening the very criminal organizations the intervention seeks to dismantle, ultimately making them more entrenched and resilient.

The designation of Mexican cartels as Foreign Terrorist Organizations introduces further complications. Under US law, providing material support to terrorist groups carries severe legal penalties, including life imprisonment. It would raise significant legal and ethical questions regarding the accountability of American actors involved in arms trafficking to these groups. Each year, an estimated 200,000 firearms cross the border from the United States into Mexico, fueling cartel violence. Would US-based gun manufacturers, dealers, and intermediaries who intentionally or inadvertently supply these weapons be held legally responsible under anti-terrorism laws? If so, the implications of such legal measures would extend far beyond Mexico, forcing a re-evaluation of US domestic policies regarding arms exports and regulatory oversight.

With these historical, political, and social dynamics in mind, a US military intervention in Mexico would be not only impractical but also deeply counterproductive. It would escalate instability, strengthen nationalist resistance, hurt both economies and entangle the US in yet another protracted and unwinnable conflict. Ultimately, addressing the challenges posed by transnational criminal organizations requires a more comprehensive strategy that prioritizes intelligence cooperation, economic development, and diplomatic engagement over unilateral military action. Any attempt to impose a military solution on Mexico’s security crisis would not only fail to achieve its objectives but would also worsen the very problems it seeks to resolve.

**1AR – UQ**

1. **Framing issue is that there is zero UQ for any DA impact. Congress can’t touch Trump – he’s obsessed with expanding presidential power, retaliating against political opponents, and adopting extremist policies. Democrats barely try and always fail to engage in oversight. The only question is whether he throws the towel because of midterms losses, not whether he pursues a maximalist agenda.**
2. **Courts and executive officials minimize the worst damage. It’s comparatively far more effective than impeachment, which does nothing.**

Jack **Goldsmith 24** – interviewing Kate Shaw & David French, ‘It Will Be a More Robust Check on Trump Than the G.O.P. Congress’: Three Legal Experts on Trump 2.0,” 12/21, https://www.aei.org/op-eds/it-will-be-a-more-robust-check-on-trump-than-the-g-o-p-congress-three-legal-experts-on-trump-2-0/

David French: We can’t underestimate the collapse of impeachment as a deterrent against presidential misbehavior. The combination of the loss of impeachment as a meaningful check on presidential power and the Supreme Court’s immunity decision now means that presidents enjoy remarkable freedom from both political and legal accountability.

Shaw: So with the elimination of both impeachment (and perhaps congressional oversight generally) and postpresidency prosecutions as meaningful checks on presidential misconduct or overreach, where do you both see the checks on the incoming Trump administration coming from?

Goldsmith: I would not exaggerate how much impeachment (which I agree has been diminished) and the threat of postpresidency prosecution were ever meaningful checks on the president. One important check is that subordinate executive branch officials through whom the president must almost always act should remain subject to criminal law checks — that has always been a powerful force in checking the president (and was in Trump 1.0). The main and very important check beyond that will come from courts, although courts cannot consider every form of abuse. Before Trump 1.0, executive branch norms did a lot of work, but they, too, are much diminished now.

Shaw: Do you also disagree with at least some of Trump’s advisers — like Elon Musk and Vivek Ramaswamy, at least by the evidence of their recent opinion essay in The Wall Street Journal — who think that the Supreme Court will be a reliable ally in a second term?

Goldsmith: I do not think the court will be a reliable ally of the Trump administration. There were many cases in the first term — the DACA case, the census citizenship case, more — where the Supreme Court stood up to Trump. Ultimately it depends on the issue.

French: I strongly disagree with the Supreme Court’s immunity ruling, but as Jack said, a broader view of the current court’s jurisprudence shows that it’s hardly a rubber stamp for Trump and MAGA legal arguments. For example, in addition to the cases Jack mentioned, it turned back several of Trump’s efforts to steal the 2020 election, rejected Republican arguments about the Voting Rights Act and rejected the core of the Trumpist independent state legislature doctrine. It will be a more robust check on Trump than the G.O.P. Congress, and it’s not close.

1. **State governments and civil society institutional collapse.**

Michael **Kazin 24** – Professor in the Department of History at Georgetown University, Ph.D. from Stanford University, B.A. from Harvard University, Elected to American Academy of Arts and Sciences, "Right-Wing Populism Is a Morbid Symptom of Political Transition," Populism Studies, 12/24/2024, https://www.populismstudies.org/professor-kazin-right-wing-populism-is-a-morbid-symptom-of-political-transition/

First of all, Congress is still fairly evenly divided between the two parties, even though Republicans are in charge. Many large states, such as New York, California, Pennsylvania, Massachusetts, and Illinois, are governed by Democrats, and most of these states have Democratic majorities in their legislatures as well. These state governments can act and bring cases to court to challenge some of Trump’s policies.

Civil society in the United States remains relatively strong. There are significant non-governmental organizations, like the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU), which will likely file lawsuits against some of Trump’s actions—particularly those related to immigration. For example, if he tries to deport children born in the US to immigrant parents (who are American citizens by birthright), the ACLU and others will step in.

Even though the grassroots left is somewhat dormant and exhausted since the election, there are still key groups on the left, including unions like the American Federation of Teachers and the United Auto Workers. These organizations were supportive of Kamala Harris and will mobilize opposition against Trump’s administration.

As always, Trump’s ability to act depends on how popular he remains. If his popularity holds, he will have more freedom to pursue his agenda. However, the court system remains a check on his power. While the Supreme Court leans conservative, with three justices appointed by Trump during his first term, other courts are more balanced, with progressives or liberal judges presiding over lower courts.

I anticipate chaos and turmoil, but that doesn’t necessarily mean democratic institutions are in existential danger.

One area of concern is Trump’s apparent eagerness to sue media organizations he disagrees with. For instance, he already sued ABC News over a comment made by anchor George Stephanopoulos, and ABC settled for several million dollars. He might pursue similar legal actions against other media outlets, particularly legacy institutions like The New York Times, The Washington Post, and major networks. While this could intimidate some of these institutions, he won’t be able to silence the Internet or prevent people from organizing protests.

The military, which served as a check on him during his first term—particularly during the protests of 2020—will likely play a similar role this time. He won’t be able to call on the military to suppress peaceful demonstrations, even if he expresses the desire to do so.

I wouldn’t call myself optimistic, but I am hopeful. Also, as I mentioned earlier, he only has four years in this term and likely only two effective years to implement policies. So, I’m not as fearful as some others I know.

Implications for Global Populism and Far-Right Alliances

And lastly, Professor Kazin, right-wing populism continues to rise across Europe despite the liberal European Union’s success story. How do you think populist parties and movements will be influenced globally after Trump begins his second term? Could his presidency embolden far-right leaders abroad and foster new alliances among far-right populist governments?

Professor Michael Kazin: Well, that’s certainly a possibility. As you know, he’s been very close to Viktor Orbán. Orbán has been invited to National Conservative Conferences, and there was even one held in Budapest, which I believe was the first time an American conservative organization hosted its conference overseas. Clearly, right-wing populist leaders, including those of parties like the Rassemblement National (RN) in France, are likely very pleased with Trump’s reelection. This is probably true for right-wing populist parties and movements across the continent.

At the same time, if you emphasize “America First” and express suspicion toward European institutions such as the EU or NATO, it becomes very difficult to form any kind of operationally powerful alliance between Trump and his counterparts in Europe.

Structurally and historically, I believe we’re in what could be described as an interregnum—a period of transition. My friend Gary Gerstle, in his excellent recent book, describes the end of the neoliberal order, which has concluded in many ways and in some places entirely. As the Italian Marxist theorist Antonio Gramsci famously said, during such an interregnum, "many morbid symptoms appear." From my perspective, right-wing populism is one such morbid symptom.

However, as demands grow for the state to provide a decent living for a majority of its citizens—and as governments actually fulfill those demands—I think there could be a revival of left-wing populism or social democracy, even if it’s not labeled as such. People will demand that the government deliver on its promises to improve living standards for the majority, ideally in collaboration with private capital.

I am somewhat heartened by the fact that Trump is limited to four years. He cannot serve more than that without a constitutional amendment, which is extraordinarily difficult to achieve in this country—far more so than in many others.

Additionally, most Americans who support Trump are not particularly enthusiastic about alliances between the United States and other countries. They prefer the US to remain independent of such alliances, especially if those alliances are perceived to be costly. So, we’ll have to see how this unfolds.

**–AT: Congress Checks**

1. **Zero evidence of success. They impeached him twice and spent 4 years trying to convince the country he was a Russian agent – it made him more popular and increased his 2024 win margin.**
2. **Trump is uncancellable. Increased Democratic oversight can only make it worse.**

Stephen **Collinson 25** – “The Democrats go ‘Trump lite’ in latest plan to save democracy,” 8/20, https://www.cnn.com/2025/08/21/politics/newsom-obama-trump-texas-california-redistricting-analysis

Democrats have tried everything to beat Donald Trump.

But they’re only 1 for 3 in presidential elections against him.

Twice, they impeached him — but that didn’t destroy his political career.

Several top Democratic prosecutors brought the force of the law against him, but in trying to bring him down, they only made him stronger.

They’ve tried to “go high” when he went low. But he went lower and won.

And painting Trump as the worst-ever threat to American democracy didn’t thwart the greatest White House comeback story in history.

So, what do Democrats do now?

How Newsom fought back against Texas and soft-launched his 2028 campaign

The latest plan, piloted by California Gov. Gavin Newsom, whose counteroffensive just won the support of former President Barack Obama, is to be a bit more like Trump — but only up to a point and for a limited time.

California state legislators are expected on Thursday to pass bills to set up a statewide referendum in November on redrawing the state’s congressional maps in a way that could net Democrats five seats in the House of Representatives.

The counterattack went into force after deep-red Texas enacted its plan, ordered by the president, to launch a rare mid-cycle redistricting effort in search of five Republican House seats. Trump is blatantly attempting to save the GOP — and himself — from losing the chamber in the 2026 midterms and is prepared to do anything to prevent it.

Texas Democrats made a big noise, leaving the state to block votes on the plan — but like almost all other party schemes to slow Trump, it was doomed to fail. The Texas House passed the redistricting bill on Wednesday; it will now move to the state Senate.

Newsom — who has a long and testy history with the president — but who shares some of his instincts for stunt politics — is not just taking on Trump by leveraging the mechanics of government in the Democratic cause.

He’s also personifying the maxim that one way to defang a bully is to laugh at him. The governor’s turned his social media accounts into a parody of the president’s own huffing and puffing in block capitals on Truth Social.

“THANK YOU FOR YOUR ATTENTION TO THIS MATTER! — GN” Newsom wrote after a post on X earlier this month, trolling Trump by mimicking one of his online quirks.

This might all seem rather immature and below the dignity of the governor of one of the most powerful states in the union. But it’s playing Trump at his own social media game and recognizes that the president has shattered the norms of political speech.

Fighting anti-democratic fire with fire

A more serious argument many Democrats are now making is that the Republican Party has transformed into such an anti-democratic force that they must do everything to fight back.

Sure, it would be more noble for Democrats to stand on principle and refuse to follow Republicans down an authoritarian path by just drawing up more House seats because they feel like it. But they’d be sure to lose.

Newsom’s response might be cynical. But he’s also seized on the Texas redistricting fight because he’s one of the few Democrats who have power and know how to use it. He’s also channeling palpable demands from the Democratic base for more of a fight.

“He doesn’t play by a different set of rules,” Newsom said of Trump last week. “He doesn’t believe in the rules.” On Monday, Newsom seized on Trump’s latest Truth Social rant about mail-in voting with his own post on X that aimed to get into the president’s head.

“Trump knows he is going to LOSE in 2026,” Newsom wrote. “His plan to rig new Congressional seats is going to backfire — thanks to California. Now, he’s clamoring for other ways to cook the results. This man reeks of DESPERATION.”

Newsom is taking a political gamble. There is no guarantee that enough of California’s voters will agree with his attempt to change the state Constitution. The California Citizens Redistricting Commission is a cherished plank of state democracy.

But as he eyes the White House, the California governor has created a platform to elevate himself over Democratic rivals in galvanizing demands for more urgency in the fight against Trump and his administration challenging election fairness on multiple fronts.

In effect, he’s soft-launching a bid for the 2028 Democratic nomination without having to make it official. If he succeeds in creating more seats for his party and it captures the House next year, he will claim a lion’s share of the credit.

Not quite hope and change

Obama addressed the conundrum of whether to play by the rules on redistricting as a true democrat might in a speech on Tuesday night.

“I’ve had to wrestle with my preference, which would be that we don’t have political gerrymandering,” he said at a fundraiser for the National Democratic Redistricting Committee. The ex-president added: “What I also know is that if we don’t respond effectively, then this White House and Republican-controlled state governments all across the country, they will not stop, because they do not appear to believe in this idea of an inclusive, expansive democracy.”

Obama said he had “tremendous respect” for Newsom’s approach in that Newsom made the California response conditional on what Texas did. He also praised Newsom’s proposal to restore the state’s independent redistricting committee after the 2030 census — following Trump’s term.

The 44th president’s pragmatism reflects bitter experience, since he rocketed to attention in a 2004 Democratic National Convention address in which he declared, “There’s not a liberal America and a conservative America — there’s the United States of America.”

Obama might be best remembered for soaring speeches. But eight years since he left the White House, it’s often forgotten he could play hardball: His 2012 reelection campaign ruthlessly savaged GOP nominee Mitt Romney’s character.

Arguing that democracy was not “self-executing,” Obama said that if Democrats really believe their own rhetoric, they should do something about it. He called for more support for the NDRC, litigation and organizing.

And Obama also made striking allusions to the fights against slavery and racial discrimination in the 20th century. “It took organizing and activism, and people demonstrating and sometimes getting beat or thrown in jail. It took a civil war,” he said. “It took extraordinary leadership and courage in order to amend the Constitution. And then to make sure that those victories were actually manifested required people to march and go to jail and in some cases, die.” This came against a backdrop of the supine response of law firms, universities and corporate chieftains to Trump’s power grabs.

Obama’s warning posed the immediate question of whether the ex-president will be taking a more prominent political role himself. Obama has been a caustic critic of Trump at key moments — for instance during the 2020 and 2024 Democratic National Conventions, when he warned about his successor’s threat to democracy. But he has wide interests in a lucrative retirement, including in film production and advocacy for his post-presidential foundation. And ex-presidents (among many others) know there can be a price for standing up to a successor who has weaponized the Justice Department.

And would Obama be an effective force?

His efforts in 2024, including a barn-burner speech at the convention in Chicago that was one-upped by former first lady Michelle Obama, couldn’t prevent Trump’s return to the White House. Many Democrats are pining for a new generation of leaders. And the next Democratic president, whenever he or she arrives, will require fresh vision and energy after the GOP’s attempt to eviscerate the government.

Meanwhile, Newsom isn’t the only Democrat adopting some of Trump’s methods to try to gain traction in the age of fragmented media and online anarchy. Texas Rep. Jasmine Crockett, for instance, has been trolling the president, Trump-style on social media. “The man in the White House wants to ‘crack down’ on crime in D.C.… cute,” she wrote on X this week. “The audacity of sitting in the Oval Office with felony charges and thinking you can lecture anyone on ‘law and order.’”

The dangers in playing Trump’s game

Still, Democrats had better be careful. However brazen they get, they’ll never match Trump’s flame-throwing. A subtext of Trump’s populism is that all politics are corrupt. And if voters believe that the Democrats are just as bad as the president, his own more venal behavior won’t seem as bad.

Trump and MAGA Republicans are trying to create such equivalence. They’ve portrayed the criminal indictments against Trump during his campaign as the cold-blooded exploitation of government power — even though several of them arose from his attempt to steal the 2020 election. The GOP has better arguments that he was singled out in a successful civil fraud prosecution against him, his adult sons and the Trump Organization in New York.

And when Republicans argue that Democrats are guilty of flagrant partisan redistricting of House seats in states they control, like Illinois and Maryland, they have a point. Still, most such efforts fit into the conventional corruption of the age-old practice of gerrymandering. No modern political figure has attempted the assaults on democracy and elections carried out by Trump.

The run-up to the midterms may also show whether voters want another showdown over democracy when they are pained by still-high grocery prices and a struggle to afford housing. Neither party has compelling plans to offer relief. No wonder Trump’s approval ratings are underwater and Democrats have been plumbing record lows in popularity this year.

Democrats are now vowing to “fight fire with fire,” as New York Gov. Kathy Hochul put it recently.

But getting down in the muck and fighting dirty with Trump is risky.

He’s miles better at it than they are.

1. **He’ll bypass Congress entirely.**

Lindsey **Granger 25** – “Trump trampling Congress? Republicans warn of eroding checks on power,” 9/8, https://thehill.com/opinion/lindseys-lens/5492088-trump-executive-overreach-congress/

Time and again, Trump has taken actions that bypass Congress entirely. He’s launched military campaigns without authorization, withheld information from lawmakers, and even clawed back money Congress already approved. These aren’t small slip-ups. They’re full-on assaults on the separation of powers.

Take national security. The Pentagon recently blocked Sen. Mark Warner (D-Va.), the senior Democrat on the Senate Intelligence Committee, from conducting oversight at a U.S. spy agency. That decision came after Laura Loomer, a far-right conspiracy theorist, criticized the meeting. Think about that: a sitting senator, tasked with oversight, was sidelined because of pressure from a fringe influencer. That’s not how democracy is supposed to work.

Or let’s look at Venezuela. Armed forces launched a military campaign against alleged cartel members without notifying Congress — something past presidents, Democrat and Republican alike, made sure never to do. Lawmakers said the lack of transparency fit a troubling pattern: the Trump administration simply ignoring requirements to keep Congress in the loop on national security.

And then there’s money. Trump used a rare maneuver called a “pocket rescission” to cancel nearly $5 billion in congressionally approved foreign aid. Democrats cried foul. Even some Republicans questioned whether that was legal.

Trump to require $100K fee for H-1B visa application

His heavy-handed use of the military has also drawn legal challenges. A federal judge ruled that Trump’s deployment of the National Guard to Los Angeles was illegal. Washington, D.C., officials have sued him for sending thousands of troops into the city without local consent. And now, as the president threatens to do the same thing in Chicago, even one of his supporters, Megyn Kelly, is saying out loud what constitutional scholars have been saying for months:

“We can’t just send them in to random cities in support of just fighting crime,” the political commentator said, “you really can’t do without the invitation of a governor. So we’re heading for an uncomfortable showdown with Governor Pritzker. We can’t have Trump going in without the invitation of this governor, I’m sorry but we can’t have it. He does not have the constitutional permission.”

The same goes for Iran. When Trump ordered strikes on nuclear facilities there, both Democrats and Republicans raised red flags.

Said House Minority Leader Hakeem Jeffries (D-N.Y.): “Donald Trump and the administration chose to ignore the Constitution, and so they’re going to have to come before Congress and explain their justification for an offensive military strike against Iran.”

Even Republican Congressman Thomas Massie (Ky.) weighed in, saying the strikes were “not constitutional.”

You see the patten, but here’s the bigger picture: Trump has already signed nearly 200 executive orders — even setting a record for the most in any president’s first 100 days. Republicans, the same party that used to scream about executive overreach, have mostly stayed silent as Trump does whatever he wants.

The truth is, the founders never intended for America to have an all-powerful president. They gave Congress the power of the purse, the power to declare war, and the responsibility to provide oversight. By sidelining Congress, Trump isn’t just rewriting norms — he’s rewriting the Constitution in practice. And the scariest part is that every time lawmakers shrug, it becomes harder to claw back that power.

1. **No chance of real oversight – Dems confirmed his insane cabinet picks. Only a risk of poking the bear.**

Amie **Parnes &** Alexander **Bolton 25** – “Democrats fume over weak early response to Trump,” 2/3, https://thehill.com/homenews/senate/5119639-democrats-frustration-trump-agenda

Democrats are fuming about their party leadership’s early response to President Trump.

Strategists say the reaction to Trump is inconsistent and not aggressive enough to combat Trump, who has taken a series of actions to remake the government.

In a whirlwind first two weeks in office, Trump has issued a string of executive orders, removed agency watchdogs and eliminated government diversity programs.

And while Democrats have begun to punch back, strategists say it’s not nearly enough, especially as a number of Democrats in the Senate join Republicans in confirming Trump’s Cabinet officials.

“Democratic leadership acts like it’s permanently 2006, a year when, yes, we took back the Senate, but also before the Republican Party found a cult leader and lost its collective minds,” Democratic strategist Christy Setzer said. “We don’t live in that world anymore; we have a lifelong conman and convicted felon in the Oval Office who tries every day to turn this country into a dictatorship. Let’s start acting like it.

“That means you can’t be mad about Trump trying to freeze government spending in the morning, and vote for his Treasury secretary — who will destroy the economy — in the afternoon,” Setzer added. “Stop helping Trump.”

Another strategist put it this way: “Trump is eating us for lunch, and for the most part, we’re letting him.”

Frustrations mounted during a tense call last week between Democratic governors and Senate Democratic Leader Chuck Schumer (N.Y.). Six Democratic governors, including Illinois Gov. JB Pritzker and Massachusetts Gov. Maura Healey, pressed Schumer to put up more of a fight against Trump’s agenda.

Healey specifically urged Schumer to slow down Senate votes and do more to stir up public opposition, according to The New York Times, which first reported the call.

That produced an exasperated response from Senate Democrats, who spoke on the floor late into the night Wednesday to highlight the impact the funding freeze ordered by Trump’s budget office would have on communities around the country.

“I would say to my friend [Pritzker], as you would like to have a majority of governors, we would like to have the majority of senators. There’s a limit to how much we can we do,” Senate Democratic Whip Dick Durbin (Ill.) said.

Senate Democrats are divided over how hard they should fight to resist Trump’s agenda, with Democrats up for reelection in battleground states looking for areas of compromise.

Seven Democrats voted last week to confirm Kristi Noem as secretary of Homeland Security, where she will have oversight of Trump’s border security and immigration policies, including plans to deport hundreds of thousands of immigrants.

Sen. Chris Murphy (D-Conn.) is calling for Democrats to put up more resistance against Trump’s nominees. He slowed the confirmation process down last month by putting a hold on John Ratcliffe, Trump’s pick to head the CIA.

“I’m not voting for a single nominee while this crisis over federal spending persists, and I don’t think we should proceed to any legislation until Republicans stand up and start helping us protect democracy,” Murphy said last week, referring to Trump’s executive orders freezing broad swaths of federal funding.

Murphy argued that voters around the country won’t fully accept the alarms Democrats have raised about Trump’s agenda until they see Democratic senators and House members deploying every tactic they can to fight it in Washington.

“I do not think that we will be able to convince people that this is a serious, grave moment if we are helping them populate a deeply corrupt government and helping them pass legislation here,” he said.

Murphy noted that Doug Burgum, Trump’s pick to lead the Interior Department, will oversee the effort to expand oil and gas drilling on federal lands. He just got “a whole bunch of Democratic votes,” the senator said.

Twenty-five Democrats and Sen. Angus King (I-Maine), who caucuses with Democrats, voted to confirm Burgum on Thursday.

“We are wondering why people out there are not rising up in the way that they did in 2017, even though Trump’s conduct is worse,” Murphy said. “I think they watch us supporting his policies and his nominees and come to the conclusion it must not be that bad.”

At the same time, Senate progressives were deeply frustrated with centrists who voted last month with Republicans to pass the Laken Riley Act, which mandates the federal detention of migrants accused of theft, burglary or assaulting law enforcement.

Democratic critics warned their colleagues it would worsen the problem of “mass incarceration” and likely sweep up children in mass detentions.

Some Democratic senators said they were frustrated Schumer didn’t keep members of his caucus in line before they voted to take up that bill on the Senate floor, putting it on a fast track to passing and getting signed into law as one of Trump’s first major accomplishments.

One Democratic senator acknowledged Democrats were caught flat-footed.

**1AR – Link**

1. **Midterm win quells his worst lash out impulses – maintaining the GOP trifecta keeps him focused on domestic distractions and ensures the country can ride him out until 2028 – that’s Kilgore.**
2. **Midterm loss causes war – multiple hotspots. Empirics are aff.**

Carl **Gibson 25** – “Trump Knows He's Failing — and He's Hoping a New War Will Bail Him Out,” 6/26, https://www.occupy.com/article/trump-knows-he-s-failing-and-he-s-hoping-new-war-will-bail-him-out

President Donald Trump has a new shiny object he’s hoping will distract the media from his catastrophic second term: A new war in the Middle East.

In the 1997 film “Wag the Dog,” Robert De Niro plays Conrad Brean — a professional distraction artist — who is hired by the president of the United States to divert the media’s attention away from a sex scandal with an underage girl just weeks before the election. Brean ends up teaming up with a Hollywood producer played by Dustin Hoffman to fabricate a war in Albania, which successfully pushes the sex scandal to the back pages of the newspaper before it disappears entirely from the news cycle, resulting in the president’s reelection.

Trump is very familiar with the art of distraction, and even as a private citizen he knew the power a war has over the media’s fickle attention span. On October 9, 2012, Trump tweeted: “Now that Obama’s poll numbers are in tailspin — watch for him to launch a strike in Libya or Iran. He is desperate.”

While it’s true that Iran obtaining nuclear weapons would present a danger to Israel, and while Israel is a sovereign country with its own military free to do what it feels necessary to protect itself, it’s also true that what happens between Iran and Israel should be of no concern to Americans, beyond macroeconomic reverberations (like the pending increase in oil prices due to the closure of the Strait of Hormuz). Secretary of State and National Security Advisor Marco Rubio made that clear in a statement he issued following Israel’s first strikes in Iran in mid-June, telling the world that Israel “took unilateral action against Iran,” that the United States was “not involved with strikes against Iran,” and that the US’ only position was that it aimed to protect “American forces in the region.”

However, after the United States conducted a series of strikes with its B-2 bombers on Iranian nuclear sites, the US is officially involved in Israel’s conflict with Iran. The coming weeks will be critical to see if the media is still capable of walking and chewing gum at the same time, as editors and journalists will have to choose between allowing its gaze to be diverted by the latest shiny object or continuing to cover the ongoing collapse of both Trump’s popular support, the first major domestic policy push of his second term, a debilitating trade war wreaking havoc on American businesses and consumers, and the increasing size and frequency of nationwide protests against his administration.

Presidents have relied on war in the past to distract from failures

To be clear, Trump would be far from the first US president to use war as a means of keeping the American public distracted from unflattering developments at home. In the fall of 2006, the Republican Party suffered a shellacking in the midterm elections and lost control of both chambers of Congress, with Democrats gaining a net total of 31 House seats, five Senate seats, and six governorships. It marked the first time since the Republican Party’s founding in 1854 that not a single Republican flipped a House, Senate, or gubernatorial seat previously held by a Democrat. On January 10, 2007 – just a week after the new Democratic-controlled Congress was sworn in – President George W. Bush announced a major troop surge in Iraq.

Democratic presidents have also carried out questionably timed military operations when they themselves were going through periods of unpopularity. In December of 1998, President Bill Clinton carried out a series of strikes on Iraq that the administration said were intended to “degrade” Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein’s ability to manufacture weapons of mass destruction. Then-Senate Majority Leader Trent Lott (R-Mississippi) called the timing of the operation “suspect” and “cursory,” given that Republicans were in the midst of impeachment proceedings against Clinton in response to the Monica Lewinsky sex scandal. Just two days after the strikes, the Republican-controlled House of Representatives impeached Clinton (he was later acquitted by the Senate).

Given recent history, Trump suddenly using US military resources to attack Iran despite campaigning on pulling the US out of foreign conflicts naturally provokes questions about why he’s suddenly flip-flopping on his “America First” approach to foreign policy. The Associated Press recounted Trump calling former UN Ambassador Nikki Haley (who served in his first administration) a “warmonger” during his 2024 campaign. During a campaign rally in New Hampshire, Trump described his rival’s ideology as “let’s kill people all over the place and let’s make a lot of money for those people that make the messes.” He also frequently boasted that he was the only US president “in generations” who didn’t start a war.

Trump also railed against foreign wars during his first bid for the presidency. During a 2016 Republican presidential debate, Trump called the Iraq War a “big fat mistake.” And in a CNN interview, he also called the US’ invasion of Afghanistan a “terrible mistake” that cost trillions of dollars and thousands of lives.

However, just five months into his second term, Trump has reversed all of those prior positions by getting the US involved in a war with one of the two leading superpowers of the Middle East (the other being Israel). Unlike Iraq, which is a country of 168,754 square miles that had a population of 26.8 million in 2003 prior to Bush’s invasion, Iran spans 636,372 square miles and has a population of 90.61 million. According to the United Nations, Iran is the 17th most populous country in the world.

Even the most diehard members of Trump’s base are starting to turn on him over his bombing of Iran. Former Rep. Matt Gaetz (R-Florida) — who Trump initially tapped to be his second-term attorney general before Gaetz withdrew his nomination roughly a week later — said during a recent episode of his show on the far-right One America News Network that the bombing was “not about Iran’s nuclear program.” He pointed out that North Korea’s nuclear program was a “far greater threat to the United States than Iran’s,” and that he had firsthand knowledge of North Korea’s capabilities as a former member of the House Armed Services Committee for eight years.

“Iran has neither the bomb, the delivery system, nor the re-entry vehicle that you would need for any intercontinental ballistic missile to launch and reenter orbit,” Gaetz said. “North Korea has all three! North Korea could launch a nuclear weapon at [the] mainland United States today. We’ve probably got the ability to knock it out of the sky, but Iran can’t even get their bird in the air.”

Steve Bannon, who was Trump’s first-term White House chief strategist, lamented that Trump may have ended up embroiling the United States in another “forever war” if Iran retaliates and the US strikes back in response to the Iranian regime. Far-right Rep. Marjorie Taylor Greene (R-Georgia) has accused the “uniparty” of attempting to “politically destroy” her for “opposing regime change in Iran.” And Rep. Thomas Massie (R-Kentucky), who voted in line with Trump’s positions 71% of the time in his first term, told CNN’s Manu Raju that Trump’s offensive against Iran could mean Republicans “lose the majority” after the 2026 midterms.

“I think this was a bad move politically, but it’s also just a bad move legally and Constitutionally and policy wise,” Massie said, adding that Trump “absolutely” broke his campaign promise to not involve the US in any new foreign wars.

As a nation whose military is already stretched thin attempting to keep Russia from conquering Ukraine, and trying to keep China from taking over Taiwan, the US can hardly afford another long-term commitment in the Middle East. So what’s the real reason for Trump’s sudden about-face?

Trump is hoping a new war in the Middle East will bail him out

Just before the June strikes on Iran, Trump experienced a slew of negative poll results showing that most Americans have soured on his second term. And it isn’t just Democrats and independents with a negative opinion of the current administration — a growing number of Republicans are also less enthusiastic in their support of Trump since his second term began in January:

Trump had a job approval rating of just 38% according to a Quinnipiac University poll in mid-June. The renowned polling institution specifically found that HR 1 (his “One Big Beautiful Bill Act”) has an underwater approval rating, with 53% of respondents saying they opposed the legislation while just 27% support it (20% had no opinion). Only 67% of respondents who identified as Republican said they backed the legislation.

An NBC News/SurveyMonkey poll from June found that 55% of Americans aged 18 and up disapprove of Trump’s performance five months into his second term. While that number remains unchanged from an April survey, pollsters found that Republicans in June were 5% less likely to say that they “strongly support” the administration. And while 46% of respondents who identified with Trump’s MAGA movement told NBC in April that they were “thrilled” with Trump’s policies, that number dropped to 37% in June.

Even on the specific issues that helped him get reelected, like immigration and the economy, Trump’s popular support is slipping. The Economist’s polling data shows Trump underwater on kitchen-table issues like taxes and spending, inflation and prices, and jobs and the economy. Pew Research found in early June that while Americans were evenly split on Trump’s handling of immigration, a majority of respondents disapproved of specific actions, like Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) raids on workplaces (54% disapproval), ending Temporary Protected Status for immigrants who came to the US fleeing war and persecution in their home countries (59% disapproval), and suspension of most asylum applications (60% disapproval).

In addition to these polls, Trump has also experienced significant public protests against his administration. The June “No Kings” protests — which coincided with both Trump’s 79th birthday and his military parade honoring the 250th anniversary of the Army — brought out roughly five million people in more than 2,100 cities in the US and around the world. Data journalist G. Elliott Morris argued that the “No Kings” event was the single-largest day of protest in US history, eclipsing even the Women’s March of 2017.

And as the Quinnipiac poll touched on, Trump’s first major domestic policy bill is on life support in the Republican-controlled US Senate, after only barely passing through the majority-Republican House of Representatives by a one-vote margin. Given their 53-47 Senate majority, Republicans can only afford three defections if they hope to pass a bill back to the House with a tie-breaking vote from Vice President JD Vance. And because moderate Republicans like Sens. Susan Collins (R-Maine) and Lisa Murkowski (R-Alaska) have already publicly indicated a hesitancy to support the bill, Trump can only afford to have one more Republican vote no, assuming all Democrats remain opposed.

This could prove exceedingly difficult, as even reliably conservative senators like Josh Hawley (R-Missouri), Ron Johnson (R-Wisconsin) and Rand Paul (R-Kentucky) have all gone on the record sharply criticizing the bill. Hawley — whose constituency includes a large share of residents who rely on Medicaid for health insurance – has said he wouldn’t vote for a bill that significantly cuts the program. Johnson has argued the bill doesn’t go far enough to slash federal spending, and Paul has said he wouldn’t vote for a bill that raises the US’ debt limit – even though not doing so could put the US in default and jeopardize the global economy by mid-July, according to Reuters.

Even Sen. Tommy Tuberville (R-Alabama), who has been one of Trump’s most stalwart supporters in the Senate, has openly expressed his concern about one provision in the bill that forces states to share the burden of funding the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP, or food stamps) for the first time in US history. The former Auburn University football coach — who is now seeking the Republican nomination in Alabama’s 2026 gubernatorial election — hasn’t said this is a line in the sand for him, though his statement suggests that the food stamps section of HR 1 may need to be revised in order to ensure his support.

Trump’s ongoing trade war with China has also continued to plague his public perception, with CNBC reporting in May that Americans are still likely to see higher prices and lighter shelves at stores despite a reprieve in the imposition of new import duties. Retailers say that the increase in tariffs has made it economically unfeasible to complete full orders. And because the typical turnaround in the China-US supply chain is three months between the ordering process and goods being shipped and stocked, this means that parents shopping for back-to-school season in August could be faced with supply shortages and higher-than-expected prices.

Following a multi-day trade summit in London, the Trump administration announced an agreed-upon framework for a trade deal with China that still keeps tariffs at higher rates than before the trade war started. The World Economic Forum reported that tariffs on Chinese imports would be at 55%. This includes the 10% universal tariff on all trade partners announced in April, along with a 20% tariff on Chinese goods and preexisting 25% tariffs that Trump put in place during his first term. Roughly 60% of Walmart’s inventory comes from China, meaning families that do their shopping at the retail giant can be expected to pay significantly higher prices for many products.

With so many issues at home dragging down his public approval rating, Trump may welcome a new war in the Middle East if only to give him a respite from the beating his administration and policy agenda have been taking in the media. Global geopolitical events are always important and should be covered, but it’s incumbent upon journalists to not take the bait and let up in their reporting on the Trump administration should the US end up getting involved in another major war. Trump’s actions in Iran should be viewed as another desperate attempt by a significantly beleaguered administration to wag the dog and divert our eyes.

1. **“Orange man bad” is unsustainable. Midterm success is a pyrrhic victory that worsens long-term Trumpism.**

Edward **Luce 25** – “America’s left cannot exploit Trump’s failures,” 9/9, https://www.ft.com/content/dfcacf73-afe0-465b-9e97-70b7e2dcf9ad

America has a conservative establishment. Its formal name is the Democratic party. Whether it be the federal government, universities, welfare or the regulatory state, Democrats fight to preserve the world as it is or was. “America is already great,” liberals cry, which is another way of saying that things were fine until Donald Trump came along. Their lodestar was Joe Biden, who personified nostalgia. Much of the party is now nostalgic for Biden. You have to be imprisoned in old ways of thinking to believe this is how US liberalism will rebound.

An invigorated US opposition would now be making hay. Trump’s team maintains a “promises kept” tally sheet. To be sure, he has in effect closed the border, demolished DEI quota culture, assaulted the deep state and launched trade wars against the rest of the world. But a big chunk of those who voted for Maga saw these moves as the means of lifting their economic prospects. The opposite is happening, which is why Trump’s numbers are in steady decline. Yet the fall in Democrats’ approval rating is even steeper. In relative terms, Trump’s political dominance has thus grown. Do not bet on a weakening economy changing that picture.

Trump’s genius is to keep pushing Democrats into reactive conservatism. That, plus the average age of the party’s leadership, makes Democrats look like permanently outraged grandparents. Trump’s assaults on pretty much every constitutional norm are indeed terrifying and outrageous. But they are remarkably inoculated against political backlash. To all intents and purposes, opposition to Trump has been reduced to a default outrage machine.

What is the solution? Democrats are a party of America’s professional elites plus various interest groups. And given that Trump won a majority of blue-collar voters, they are no longer the natural home of the working class. Any Democratic recovery would thus start by grappling with the latter’s worldview. The practical difficulty is that the party is shaped by elite professions, particularly law, government, media and academia. Such types often have a hard time concealing their distaste for those who voted for Trump. This is a poor starting point.

Democrats also face a deeper philosophical problem. Nobody knows how to reinvent 20th-century liberalism. In the US that was Franklin D Roosevelt’s 1930s New Deal, with updates over the next couple of generations. FDR built that world with “bold persistent experimentation”. His would-be heirs are stuck in a timid, persistent conservatism. They do not “welcome the hatred” of financial and business monopolists as Roosevelt did. They are the party of corporate America. No party in history could ever boast of so many expert fundraisers and humane philanthropists.

Lack of fresh ideas and cloistered demography are definitions of conservatism. If Trump did not exist, would Democrats want to reform the US administrative state? They should want to reinvent it but are now its militant defenders. A system that is so riddled with veto points that it takes years to execute simple projects and requires a PhD to navigate the tax system does not deserve to be defended. The same goes for a housing market that has priced younger voters out of the American dream and elite universities that are biased towards the children of alumni and donors. If Trump is attacking something, it must be defended to the hilt.

That Trump’s actions are destructive is no excuse. As political scientist Ruy Teixeira recently warned, Democrats are placing their chips on the “fool’s gold of midterm success”. Rather than seeking ways of reinventing a system in which America has lost faith, Democrats are betting on Trump’s defeat in next year’s congressional elections. The odds are that Republicans will lose the House of Representatives in 2026 and retain control of the Senate. Such midterm success would be a pyrrhic victory for Democrats. Biden based his 2024 re-election bid on his party’s relative success in the 2022 midterms. Look where that led.

A second piece of fool’s gold is to wait for Trumpism to die out with Trump. Even assuming that he does not launch a coup in 2028, Democrats would be unwise to think their problem will end with Trump. Familiarity with other democracies — Britain’s clueless Labour party, Germany’s moribund Social Democrats, France’s withered Socialists — shows that there is nothing unique to American populism.

1. **Internal fighting. Any midterm win is narrow and purely rhetorical. Broad hemorrhaging of support wrecks oversight.**

Will **Marshall 25** – founder and president of the Progressive Policy Institute, “Trump is sinking, but Democrats aren’t rising — here’s why,” 8/29, https://thehill.com/opinion/campaign/5475761-trump-misdirection-democrats-challenges/

Rather than reckon with such grim realities, Democrats again are seeking refuge in the politics of evasion. It takes two forms: Calls for intensifying “resistance” to Trump and the beguiling hope that success in next year’s midterm election will spare them a bruising factional fight over the party’s core principles and purposes.

Of course, Democrats should call out Trump’s destructive policies, blatant abuses of power and his diabolical knack for setting Americans at each other’s throats. But if that’s all they do, they’ll just be advertising their political impotence.

There’s a reasonable chance that, given the usual anti-incumbent dynamics of a midterm election, Democrats will recapture the House next year and thus be able to offer more than rhetorical resistance to Trump.

That’s why the president has instructed pliant Republicans in Texas and Missouri not to wait until the next census to draw new political maps. He wants them to gerrymander more Republican House seats in time for next year’s election. It’s not as bad as Jan. 6, but it reminds us that Trump is America’s election-rigger-in-chief.

But even if Democrats manage to eke out a midterm win, taking control of one chamber on Capitol Hill won’t fix their structural problem: the steady hemorrhaging over the past quarter-century of non-college voters, lately compounded by severe erosions among Black and Hispanic as well as young voters.

Without winning back a sizable chunk of working-class voters, Democrats won’t be able to compete nationally or build the large and lasting majorities they need to blunt today’s reactionary populism and govern effectively.

There’s only one way to do that: Show the country they’ve changed. That starts by publicly acknowledging mistakes, like not taking public anger over illegal immigration and crime seriously. It also means repudiating the illiberal excesses of identity politics and embracing cultural moderation.

Democrats also should jettison factory nostalgia and leave protectionism and industrial policy to Trump and right-wing populists. They need a modern, forward-looking strategy for repairing the broken engine of upward mobility for non-college workers.

A new Democratic blueprint for abundant growth and opportunity would be both pro-worker and pro-business and play to America’s strengths in innovation and entrepreneurship.

It would give priority to driving down housing, health care and energy costs, promoting competition in consolidated markets, creating more “earn and learn” opportunities for workers without college degrees to hone their job skills, radically improving public schools, restoring fiscal responsibility in Washington and making government nimbler and more user-friendly.

Let’s face it: All this will require a rupture with a party establishment that’s grown too comfortable with a status quo that serves entrenched interest groups and affluent elites but leaves working Americans on the outside looking in.

Democrats should be heartened that Americans are beginning to see through Trump’s reality-distorting attempts to play them for suckers. But it’s not enough for Trump to sink — Democrats must rise to the occasion by remaking themselves the party of economic progress and political change America needs.

1. **Inevitable Trump chaos deletes neg UQ. Increased oversight linearly makes Trump crazier.**

Jonathan **Lemire 25** – “Fear of Losing the Midterms Is Driving Trump’s Decisions,” 9/8, https://www.yahoo.com/news/articles/fear-losing-midterms-driving-trump-100000293.html

Few things make President Donald Trump angrier than the memory of his two impeachments. Despite his return to the White House this year, he frequently complains privately and publicly about Democrats’ efforts to remove him from office in his first term. Trump, to this day, insists that he did nothing wrong, calling both impeachments “witch hunts.”

And he is fearful that he might have to go through it all again.

The party out of power tends to do well in midterm elections, and Trump remembers how Democrats wielded the majority after capturing the House of Representatives in 2018. If the Democrats win control of one chamber of Congress next year—they are the slight favorites in the House, whereas the Senate would be harder—they won’t just have the ability to block whatever remains of Trump’s lame-duck legislative agenda. Armed with the power of the subpoena, they would also be able to open investigations into the Trump administration, dragging key officials to the Hill for embarrassing, headline-grabbing hearings. And even a simple majority in the House would allow Democrats the chance to impeach Trump for a third time.

The specter of investigations and impeachment has fueled many of the president’s most dramatic actions in recent weeks, three senior White House officials and two close outside allies told me. Trump’s unprecedented (and, Democrats say, illegal) mid-decade redistricting push, the deployment of the National Guard to Washington, his unceasing pressure on the Federal Reserve to cut interest rates—all can be seen as part of a sweeping, frantic attempt to swing next year’s midterm elections.

The president has told confidants that he does not want a repeat of what happened after Republicans lost control in 2018 and is not going to cost himself this time by adhering to political norms. He has been pushing aides to focus on the midterms, and he is making more of an effort than he did seven years ago to nationalize the races and to motivate Republican voters who haven’t turned out when his name isn’t on the ballot. Trump believes that not just the tenor of his final two years in office, but the shape of his legacy as a whole, ride on whether he can reverse historical political trends and hold on to the House and the Senate in 2026.

“The president believes that he stayed in his lane” in 2018—“that he took a more conservative approach and tried to reach across the aisle,” one of the senior White House officials told me. (This person, like others interviewed, was granted anonymity to speak about internal discussions.) “And look where that got him: We lost. He’s not making that mistake again.”

Trump has a tendency to inject politics into nearly every presidential act or social-media post. But the White House made a concerted pivot toward the midterms once the Republicans’ signature piece of legislation, the One Big Beautiful Bill Act, was passed into law in July, the three White House officials told me. White House aides, working with the congressional-campaign committees, knew almost immediately that they had a problem: The legislation’s tax cuts overwhelmingly favor the wealthy, and the bill will slash services and health care for many poorer Americans. The president, to the surprise of many in his party, has done very little domestic travel to promote the legislation. After Republican lawmakers began facing hostile crowds at town halls, the White House asked the GOP congressional leadership to hold fewer of them.

Meanwhile, the years-old Jeffrey Epstein scandal flared up again over the summer and has proved impossible for Trump to extinguish as more details have emerged about his relationship with the disgraced financier, who died in prison in 2019 in what was ruled a suicide after he was charged with sex trafficking. The president has faced rare defiance from portions of his MAGA base, which has demanded that the administration fulfill its promise to release more information about the powerful people who associated with Epstein. Trump’s summer of discontent has continued as he has struggled to end the wars in Ukraine and Gaza, while the economy, reacting to the president’s scattershot tariff policies, has begun to flash warning signs.

Trump’s top advisers convened a series of late-summer West Wing meetings in an effort to change the political narrative. One of the officials I spoke with downplayed the level of anxiety—“We’re not freaking out and trying to play 4-D chess,” this person told me. But the White House plotted methods to reverse its slide, including rethinking the way Republicans sell their signature piece of legislation. In recent days, the White House and Trump himself have suggested to lawmakers that they move away from the “One Big Beautiful Bill” moniker—even though it was Trump’s own coinage—and instead embrace a new name. They’ve kicked around a few possibilities, including the (not exactly accurate) “Working Families Tax Cut Bill.”

Trump’s midterms push has gone far beyond the megabill. In June, he began floating the idea that Texas should redraw its congressional-district maps in an effort to create five additional Republican seats—enough to allow the GOP to keep the House. Although both parties have long engaged in partisan gerrymandering, the Texas plan was particularly audacious: Traditionally, redistricting takes place once a decade, after the census. It had just been done in Texas in 2021 and was not due again until after the 2030 count. Texas lawmakers went ahead at the behest of the president. Democrats howled, and their local lawmakers fled the state. It didn’t matter. The maps were redrawn, setting off a redistricting arms race. California moved to redo its own maps to offset the GOP gains in Texas, while other red and blue states—Missouri, Indiana, New York, and more—began considering their own redistricting plans. (“If Republicans thought they could win on their record, they wouldn’t have opened the redistricting conversation in the first place,” Andrew Bates, a former senior staffer to President Joe Biden, told me.)

Last month, Trump spoke with Steve Bannon, and the influential outside adviser began outlining to him other maneuvers to try to change who will be able to vote in 2026 and how they will be able to do so. Over the course of a few days, Bannon called on his podcast for a mid-decade census that would exclude people in the United States without authorization (which experts have argued would be unconstitutional) and a requirement of proof of citizenship to register to vote in federal elections (which critics have described as an attempt at voter suppression). Bannon also railed against mail-in voting, a longtime crusade for Trump, and the president picked up that fight again last month by threatening an executive order to ban the process, which he claims, without evidence, has led to rampant fraud.

“There’s a very potent brew of deeply held beliefs driving these tactics,” Kevin Madden, a Republican strategist who was a senior aide on Mitt Romney’s presidential campaign, told me of Trump’s midterms push. “First and foremost, Trump thinks that his election was an absolute mandate, delivered by the voters despite every attempt by his opponents and critics to use politics and lawfare to defeat him.”

White House aides know that next year’s midterms could very well turn on the economy and privately worry about what will happen if Trump’s tariffs, which they have sold as a way to revive American industry, are permanently struck down in the courts. Most experts would say that Trump should be worried about what will happen to the economy if the tariffs do go into effect. August’s weak jobs report showed slowing growth, and that followed the previous month’s sluggish report, which had prompted Trump to fire the commissioner of the Bureau of Labor Statistics on unfounded claims of bias. The West Wing is aware of these weak signs, and is warily watching inflation and looking for ways to juice the economy. Officials are discussing a sweeping deregulation effort due this fall that is meant to spark business growth.

But Trump is also taking more extreme measures. He has unleashed a relentless pressure campaign on Federal Reserve Chairman Jerome Powell to lower interest rates and, when met with defiance, mused about ousting Powell before his term ends in May. That prospect rattled the markets, and Trump briefly backed off, only to then latch on to a right-wing narrative that Powell had overseen a wildly over-budget renovation of the Fed building in Washington and could be fired for cause. Although Trump donned a hard hat and toured the building, he seems to have let that issue slide, while continuing to slam Powell. More recently, Trump tried to fire Federal Reserve Governor Lisa Cook over unproven allegations of mortgage fraud. (Cook is suing Trump in response.) Her departure would allow Trump to replace her with someone willing to vote to lower interest rates. Or, as some in his orbit have suggested, he could demand that Powell fire Cook and then try to oust the chairman if he refuses, on the theory that the resulting cuts in rates would offset any initial market blowback. The Department of Justice recently opened an investigation into Cook, further alarming those who believe that Trump is weaponizing the federal government against anyone he sees as a political obstacle.

Although officials in the West Wing are anxious about the future of the economy, they feel confident about the radical steps Trump has taken on what they believe is a winning issue for the midterms. For generations, Republicans have attacked Democrats as soft on crime. This time, Trump is doing it with armored vehicles. His deployment of the National Guard to Washington last month triggered a backlash in the city, where many residents have made clear that they don’t want a military presence, particularly if the troops appear to be there mostly for photo ops around the National Mall. And although the president has more authority in the nation’s capital than he does in other cities, Democrats have denounced his move as federal overreach and a prelude to authoritarianism, especially after he floated the idea of also deploying troops to cities such as Chicago, Baltimore, and New York over the objections of those states’ governors.

The White House believes that the debate puts Democrats on the defensive. Violent crime rose nationwide during the coronavirus pandemic and in its immediate aftermath, and although it has fallen in most of the country since then, polling suggests that it remains a significant concern for many Americans. Trump believes that he has tapped into that, looking to play on voters’ fears more successfully than he did in 2018, when he hyped up the dangers posed by an alleged “caravan” of migrants approaching the southern border.

The overall goal of Trump’s various presidential power plays, aides told me, is to nationalize the midterms and make them about him. Trump has long believed that he is his party’s best messenger, and he mused recently about holding a national political convention in 2026, an unusual move for a nonpresidential year.

1. **At best, winning creates false optimism – that makes Trump stronger.**

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The Democrats are probably on course to have a pretty good 2026 election. They are the out-party, Trump isn’t particularly popular, Democratic partisans are highly motivated, and there is a lot of general voter discontent, particularly about the economy. That means Democrats will likely take back the House, where they only need a net gain of three seats, perhaps pick up a seat or two in the Senate and make some gains in governorships and state legislatures. Sure, Republicans will try their best to stop this by redistricting and other shenanigans but they will likely fail because the terrain is too favorable to their opponents.

That’s the good news for Democrats. The bad news is that this very success will likely ~~cripple~~ [harm] them going forward as they stare into the abyss of the 2028 election and the ongoing realignment of US politics. As they grasp onto the fool’s gold of midterm success, their opportunities to fix their party’s weaknesses will slip away—indeed, are already slipping away. This dynamic is succinctly explained by pollster Patrick Ruffini. He notes that Democrats went through a brief period of introspection after their 2024 presidential loss forced them to confront their weaknesses and the need for change. This was predictable. And also predictably brief.

But a few months later, this newfound openness to doing things differently has faded in the face of all-out opposition to Trump 2.0. In the U.S., midterm elections are a unique mechanism that squash[es] heterodoxy and lock[s] parties into sticking with their existing positions. The parties are thrown immediately back into campaign mode a few months after the election. That means the out-party quickly needs to maximize fundraising and enthusiasm from their base, which is usually at its angriest in the first few months of the opposing Administration’s term.

By favoring the out-party, midterm elections preempt the gnarly questions raised by the party’s last election defeat. And this false optimism carries through to the next presidential cycle.

If Democrats have a good election next November, you can count on their problems with Hispanic voters or young men to be memory-holed. Fans of the party’s existing strategy will argue that the current path works just fine. Just recall what happened after 2022: following a decent midterm, Democrats told themselves that Joe Biden was actually a viable candidate for re-election, that he was the only one who had beat Trump before and that he could do it again…

Or consider 2018, a smashing success for Democrats. The takeaway there was that all the party would need to do was take that Resistance mojo and double down on it for 2020. The party was on the upswing, and Democrats told themselves this meant a broad mandate for social change, not just a narrow repudiation of Trump. And so you got a race to the left to appease the groups, with hands raised on debate stages for decriminalizing border crossings and positions taken in favor of taxpayer funding for gender transition surgeries for illegal immigrants in prison.

We now know this created all sorts of downstream problems with traditional Democratic constituencies, problems invisible in the post-2018 euphoria but very apparent following the 2020 and 2024 elections…

Midterm success is all well and good, but a mere cyclical reaction to the party in power doesn’t solve the deep-seated problems exposed in the presidential year when the broadest set of voters participates…

Running a base mobilization strategy can work in midterms but in presidential years, usually gets canceled out quickly by an influx of low-information and more persuadable voters motivated by an entirely different issue set…

While many Democrats sincerely want to change how their party is perceived by low-propensity voters, all the incentives going into and following the midterms are lined up against them. The better Democrats do in the midterms, the more that arguing for a change in direction makes you the skunk at the garden party.

This all seems exactly right to me. In fact, I don’t see how any attentive Democrat could look at how the party discourse has evolved since November 2024 and not see this dynamic unfolding in real time. The fool’s gold of midterm success is once again poised to distract Democrats from what really needs to be done to secure their long-term success against a formidable populist opponent.