



ABSTRACT JOURNAL
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Letter from the Chair

Polity: Undergraduate Research Conference was established in 2025 with the goal of creating a space to present and celebrate McGill political science undergraduate students' research projects.

Starting with an initial idea of a political science conference for undergraduates, the Conference has grown into student-led panels, professor-led roundtables, graduate student-led research seminars, and networking sessions.

Polity: URC is both an opportunity to present undergraduate research and have meaningful conversations with students and faculty about topics in political science. The first-ever Conference will take place from March 19 to 20, 2026.

I am lucky to have collaborated with intelligent and passionate individuals on this endeavour, including the Conference Vice Chairs. Polity: URC would not be possible without the support of McGill's Political Science Students' Association, the McGill Graduate Association of Political Studies Students, the Department of Political Science, and Montréal-area businesses.

The Conference truly is the product of a community's hard work, and I am incredibly grateful to be Chair of the inaugural Polity: URC.



Conference Chair, Polity 2026

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THE IMPACTS OF SOCIAL MEDIA ON POLITICAL ENVIRONMENT

How Social Media Platforms Shape Exclusionary Nationalism: Lessons from Romania's 2024 Presidential Election

Samuel Cayre

How do social media platforms shape contemporary political discourse, and which actors are best positioned to gain from these dynamics? Using a qualitative, theory driven approach, this paper examines how social media platforms facilitate exclusionary nationalist rhetoric through a case study of Romania's 2024 presidential election. Building on Benedict Anderson's theory of print-capitalism as the driver for nationalism and later scholarship on the political impacts of digital media and nationalism, I argue that the algorithmic architectures of social media platforms tend to promote combative, exclusionary, and emotive forms of national expression. In Romania's 2024 presidential election, the rapid rise of far-right candidate Calin Georgescu demonstrates the central role of platforms such as TikTok in amplifying nationalist messaging. Digital infrastructures reinforce the nation-state as the dominant unit of political organisation and reshape how Romanians articulate their self-determination, promoting narratives focused on threats, grievance, and national decline. My research concludes that political actors capable of building credible political mobilisation from these divisive narratives are most likely to benefit from the contemporary social media environment.

Cultivating the Image of a Female Politician: Does Party Matter? Do American News Outlets Cover Republican and Democratic Female Politicians Differently?

Hannah Hipólito

A large body of modern research examines how gender influences opportunities for women in American politics, ranging from their electability and perceived competence to their likelihood of running for office. Despite this, most of this literature treats female politicians as a homogeneous group, treating gender as the primary influence on their political career outcomes. Partisan identity and its influence on public perceptions of female politicians remains an underresearched area. This gap is interesting due to the Republican Party's masculine gendered ethos in comparison to the Democratic Party's feminine one. Specifically, the gender identity of Republican women contrasts with their party's ethos. This paper proposes that partisan identity may be more salient than gender in media coverage of American female politicians. Through a content analysis of 160 articles from eight American news outlets, I find that coverage is determined by partisan gender ethos rather than gender alone, with Republican women associated with masculine traits like leadership and assertiveness and Democrats with feminine ideals like empathy and humanitarianism. Ultimately, the content analysis yielded compelling evidence for partisan identity as a more dominant framing in media reporting, as opposed to blanket coverage of all female politicians by their gender. These results challenge previous methodologies treating female politicians as a single group, suggesting a new analytical dimension the careers of women in politics and highlighting partisan alignment as a potential influence on electoral outcomes and perceptions of competence between female politicians.

To What Extent has YouTube News Consumption Contributed to the Intensification of Political Polarization in South Korea? More specifically, Can the Rise of YouTube as a Primary News Source Help Explain the Increasing Political Conflict in South Korea from 2016 to 2024?

Jasmine Kim

South Korea has emerged as one of the world's most politically polarized democracies, a transformation this paper attributes to YouTube's rise as the nation's dominant news platform. Existing scholarly discourse predominantly treats the 2016 impeachment of President Park Geun-hye as the definitive entry point of YouTube's political influence, framing the platform's role as a singular mobilizing force, even though traditional media platforms still dominated the information landscape. This paper challenges that scholarship, arguing instead that YouTube's entrenchment as South Korea's primary news source occurred after 2019, and that this consolidation, rather than the 2016 moment, produced the platform's most profound and lasting polarizing effects. Drawing on longitudinal data from the Korea Press Foundation Digital News Report and the Korea Institute of Public Administration Social Integration Survey (2016-2024), this paper identifies three key mechanisms of platform-driven polarization: algorithmic amplification of hyper-partisan content, exploitation of South Korea's collectivist cultural dynamics, and the subordination of policy debates to platform logic, whereby engagement-maximizing incentives systematically recast political disagreements as irreconcilable identity conflicts. Case studies spanning the COVID-19 pandemic, the 2021 presidential election, and the 2024 doctors' strike illustrate how YouTube's engagement-driven model has deepened ideological divisions. Situating South Korea within a global comparative framework alongside the United States and Mexico, this paper concludes that YouTube's polarizing architecture is neither incidental nor culturally specific, but an inherent feature of platform design with profound consequences for democratic integrity.

**THE POLITICS OF INTERVENTION
IN WARTIME VIOLENCE**

Transnational Permeability? Assessing the Impact of the 2023-2025 Gaza War on the Internal Politics of Arab States and the External Effects

Jack Hemsworth

Since the Second Intifada, scholars have argued that the rise of statism, the consolidation of Arab states, and the spread of normalization agreements have reduced the permeability of internal Arab politics on the Palestinian question. The 2023-2025 Gaza War marks a rupture. Through case studies of Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, the Gulf, and North Africa, supplemented by regional polling data and an analysis of normalization dynamics, this paper demonstrates the extent to which the war has affected internal Arab politics, and what this reveals about Palestine as a transnational issue today. I argue that the war has forced rulers to recalibrate their rhetoric and tactics, but has not overturned strategic commitments to peace treaties, security cooperation, or normalization. Palestine has been re-transnationalized from below by general public opinion, boycotts, protests, and non-state resistance, while being filtered and contained from above by consolidated authoritarian regimes connected in an “illiberal peace” with Israel. I conclude that permeability is therefore stratified: high at the societal level, but low at the level of state policy.

Women in War: Realism as a Permissive Framework for Sexual Exploitation and Abuse in the Democratic Republic of Congo

Grace Hodges

Dominant discourses often understand rape as a tragic but unavoidable consequence of wartime violence, implicitly accepting these bodies as battlegrounds for armed conflict. Simultaneously, international relations (IR) as a discipline has historically struggled to account for the multitude of ways gender shapes and defines state behaviour in our contemporary world. While comparative politics engages gender more readily, IR's state-centric focus has led the discipline to neglect gendered dimensions of conflict, particularly at the regional level. Looking closely at how international governing bodies engage with humanitarian intervention, I evaluate how the UN has navigated sovereignty norms in determining when international action is warranted. To do so, I draw on arguably one of the most well-documented cases of conflict-related sexual violence: the Democratic Republic of Congo, as well as other UN interventions in Yugoslavia and Libya. This paper works from feminist methodologies that aim to disrupt traditional public/private divides and bring women's experiences into conversations about state behaviour. I find that sovereignty norms, when in competition with human rights norms, can be permissive of wartime sexual violence by limiting international accountability mechanisms. Ultimately, I argue for an inter-framework approach that treats gender and IR as inextricable to deepen current analyses and critiques of international realities.

Narrating Neglect: The Media-Made Boundaries of Humanitarian Concern in the Rohingya Genocide and Refugee Crisis

Nell Pollak

Why has the international community's response to the Rohingya crisis remained inadequate despite legal determinations of genocide? This paper examines how differential media framing contributes to limited public salience and advocacy for Rohingya refugees by analyzing coverage patterns from June 2023 to August 2025 across four major outlets: CNN, Fox News, The New York Times, and Al Jazeera. Through systematic content analysis of framing patterns, source selection, contextual depth, and language choices, this study finds stark disparities in coverage volume and approach. Western outlets demonstrated reactive, event-driven journalism that treats persecution as a set of discrete crisis moments rather than ongoing genocide, while systematically marginalizing Rohingya voices in favor of institutional authorities. Their linguistic choices, through passive constructions and euphemistic terminology, present violence as something that happens rather than something deliberately perpetrated, therefore obscuring agency and minimizing genocidal intent. Fox News's complete silence removed the crisis entirely from conservative American discourse. In contrast, Al Jazeera's sustained coverage and inclusion of Rohingya sources positioned affected communities as political actors advocating against their own oppression rather than passive victims awaiting external rescue. Drawing on agenda-setting and framing theory, this analysis identifies correlations between coverage patterns and policy responses: media sources may not tell audiences what to think, but by choosing when persecution merits attention, these outlets can shape which crises register as urgent within the general population. The findings reveal how episodic framing and institutional focus within mainstream media coverage create blind spots that limit the sustained public pressure necessary for meaningful humanitarian intervention.

**INTERSECTION OF IDENTITY
AND POLITICAL PARTICIPATION**

Beyond the Estado Novo: Contract Corporatism as the Fulfillment of Catholic Social Teaching

William Seppala

Since the Industrial Revolution, Catholic Social Teaching (CST) has sought a durable means of resolving class conflict between labor and capital that rejects both laissez-faire liberal capitalism's neglect of social justice and collectivist socialism's subordination of the individual to the state. Far from a marginal moral doctrine, CST represents one of the most sustained normative efforts to articulate an institutional framework capable of reconciling economic efficiency, human dignity, and social cohesion. This paper evaluates whether existing systems of interest representation are capable of fulfilling these enduring mandates. The analysis contrasts three models: the Portuguese Estado Novo's State Corporatism, Distributism, and Contract (Societal) Corporatism. It demonstrates that the failure of the Estado Novo was not corporatism per se, but its authoritarian structure—specifically the asymmetric imposition of state control and repression of labor—which violated CST's core principle of subsidiarity. Similarly, the paper argues that Distributism, despite its moral aspirations, is institutionally flawed because it relies on coercive state mechanisms to enforce widespread ownership, paradoxically reproducing the very centralization it seeks to avoid. In contrast, the paper develops a model of Contract Corporatism grounded in voluntary negotiation, symmetric dependence, and reciprocal consent among functional groups. By embedding labor–capital coordination within decentralized, self-governing associations, this framework operationalizes CST principles without resorting to authoritarian control. Contract Corporatism is thus presented not as an ideological alternative to capitalism itself, but as an institutionally viable means of addressing class conflict in a manner consistent with CST's normative commitments to human dignity, subsidiarity, and social peace.

Senegal's "Unified Public" at the Root of 2024 Democratic Resilience

Kim Tirouvanziam

Against a landscape of instability among West African states, Senegal stands out as a relatively strong democracy, as demonstrated by its resilience in the face of an unconstitutional power grab by the incumbent president Macky Sall in 2024. This paper demonstrates that Senegal's political culture of independent state institutions and civil society unified across ethnic lines play a large role in its ability to withstand the 2024 crisis. Contradicting Peter Ekeh's theory of "Colonialism and the Two Publics in Africa" (1975), I argue that the resilience of these factors demonstrate a sense of moral obligation in politics, evidence a unification of "civic" and "primordial" publics that Ekeh contends are typically separate. I illustrate the positive historical influence of Senegal's Sufi brotherhoods in bridging the two publics through propagating ideas of democracy and unity, and promoting dialogue across ethnic and religious, which lies behind democratic resilience. I conclude my paper with an evaluation of Sufi leaders' increasingly direct role in Senegalese politics and leveraging of religious networks for personal gain and patronage, and how this may ultimately undermine the unification of the two publics which is critical to democracy, through fueling ethnic division.

**CRITICAL JUNCTURES:
EVOLVING LAWS AND
POLITICAL INSTITUTIONS**

From Strength to Weakness to Fiction: The Illusion of Separation of Powers in the American Constitution

Margaux Duchanaud

The separation of powers is often treated as the defining strength of the American constitutional system, designed to prevent tyranny by pitting ambition against ambition (Madison 1788). Yet, contemporary American governance is marked by persistent gridlock, executive unilateralism, and blurred democratic accountability. Therefore, this paper is motivated by a central puzzle: how did an institutional design intended to restrain power come to generate chronic dysfunction without any formal constitutional change? This paper examines how changes in the American political environment have transformed the operation of the separation of powers. It argues that what began as the Constitution's greatest strength has gradually become both a structural weakness and, increasingly, a governing fiction. While the formal division of authority between Congress, the presidency, and the judiciary remains intact, partisan incentives now routinely override institutional loyalties, producing coordination across branches rather than rivalry (Kollman 2019). Using qualitative historical–institutional analysis and illustrative cases, this paper explains how multiple veto points now exacerbate polarization, encourage executive overreach, and obscure responsibility (Binder 2003; Huq and Ginsburg 2018). In doing so, this analysis intervenes in debates on constitutional performance by demonstrating that separation of powers cannot be evaluated independently of the partisan forces that have come to animate it.

“Non-Property” and the Zapatista Reformation: The Politics of Agrarian Law in the Autonomous Communities Abstract

Tristan Hernandez

The Zapatista legal reforms in late 2023 entailed a significant departure from the political structure of Zapatista autonomy that took shape during the 1994 revolution. The Revolutionary Agrarian Law, which set the legal framework for Zapatista social and economic institutions, built in opposition to the Mexican state, was suddenly decommissioned along with the existing bodies of government within the Zapatista autonomous municipalities. This paper examines the justifications for annulling the Revolutionary Agrarian Law as expressions of the Zapatista political ethic known as *mandar obedeciendo*, or “governing while obeying”. By replacing the Revolutionary Agrarian Law with a system of land tenure known as “Non Property”, the Zapatistas demonstrate a strict adherence to this principle at the expense of long standing political institutions. Through a Critical Discourse Analysis of both the Revolutionary Agrarian Law and “Non-Property”, I demonstrate that *mandar obedeciendo* figures within Zapatista society as a robust set of democratic principles that continue to define law-making, economic institutions, and everyday politics.

**THE RESPONSE OF
AUTHORITARIAN REGIMES
IN CRISES AND REFORM**

Dancing With Demons: A Comparative Analysis of the Church's Role in Mobutu's Zaire and Habyarimana's Rwanda

Ryan Kent

Why do countries vary in the way that church and state relate to democracy? Leading scholars have advanced different explanations for why the Catholic Church has upheld authoritarian rule in certain nations and acted as a pillar of the pro-democratic camp in others, ranging from Anthony Gill's use of rational choice theory to Daniel Philpott's ideational-institutionalist account. Drawing on Philpott's work, this paper tests a two-level institutionalist hypothesis. I posit that where the Church is more autonomous and thus more democratic in its receptiveness to pressures from below, it is more likely to promote democracy, but where it lacks autonomy from the state, it acts in an authoritarian manner and finds itself unable to adopt democratic ideals, instead supporting the authoritarian regime in power. Using a most-similar systems design comparing Rwanda under Habyarimana's MRND and Zaire under Mobutu's MPR, and drawing on empirical evidence of Church membership and institutional positioning, I find that the two-level institutionalist framework best accounts for the variation in the Church's response to societal calls for democratisation. Anti-authority ideals are positively received where relations between the Church and state and within the Church itself are more horizontal and tolerant of dissenting voices. This study thus aims to contribute to the understanding of the Catholic Church's political positioning within various regime types.

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