



ISRM

THE INSTITUTE OF STRATEGIC
RISK MANAGEMENT

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CENTRE FOR THE STUDY
OF WICKED PROBLEMS

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A MESSAGE FROM DR DAVID RUBENS

The overriding themes as we look back at the opening weeks of 2026 are once again instability, uncertainty and a feeling that things are in a doom-cycle, and that things getting better is not one of the options on the list.

We seem to have entered a time of never-ending wars, where conflicts reach a state of stasis where neither side has a clear opening for victory but neither side has reached the stage where a genuine peace process can be triggered. Sudan, Somalia, Yemen, Ukraine and the Palestinian territories are all examples of that, and none of them seem to have a resolution on the horizon.

It is four years since the Russian invasion of Ukraine and twelve years since the start of the war with the invasion of Donbas in 2014, and although Russia controls close to 20 per cent of Ukrainian territory, it has neither the power to stabilise its oversight across the regions nor the energy to move further forward to a position of greater control.

For the people of Ukraine, the Holodomor, the Soviet-created famine that killed millions of Ukrainian citizens in the mid-1930's, is a living part of their personal and national identity, just as the Nakba is for the Palestinians displaced by the creation of Israel in 1948. For both groups of people, what is being seen today is not something that is new or unprecedented but is the continuation of history under a new chapter.

At the same time as, historical cycles are being repeated there is also a concerted effort to rewrite history, though it can equally be argued that this has been the case for almost as long as history has been recorded.

The concept of Global Memory Wars, where a revisionist interpretation of history is used to justify current political and geopolitical activity, is redolent of George Orwell's prescient claim that 'Who controls the past controls the future. Who controls the present controls the past'. Whereas in his vision of 1984, written in the years immediately after the Second World War and driven by a vision of a totalitarian state inspired by the Stalinist regime in Russia, the control of the past involved the physical rewriting or destruction of physical artefacts. In the current stage of information technology, simply removing something from a search engine (Tiananmen Square for example, or references to Black and Native Americans from US military archives and from Arlington National Cemetery records) can achieve the same aim, though quicker and with more efficiency.

In the turbulent world we live in, it is a cliché to say that the news cycle has sped up to such a degree that whatever was headline news last week is already half forgotten seven days later. But the speech given by Canadian premier Mark Carney at the World Economic Forum in Davos in January may well have broken that mould. He used the single word - '*rupture*' - to capture the scale and significance of the changes currently reshaping the global system. His remarks were widely interpreted as marking a clear break from the US-led international framework that has been in place since the end of the Second World War by what might be called 'the Western nations' and as recognising the emergence of a far less stable and predictable geopolitical environment

Carney was explicit in his assessment: *'Let me be direct: We are in the midst of a rupture, not a transition.'* He went on to argue that the multilateral institutions on which many states have relied, including the WTO, the UN and the COP framework, are increasingly under threat. As a result, countries are being driven towards greater strategic autonomy in areas such as energy, food, critical minerals, finance and supply chains.

This idea of rupture as a defining feature of contemporary risk is not new within academic thinking. In the early 2000s, the French scholar Patrick Lagadec explored the emergence of reality-changing ruptures in a series of influential works, including *Risks, Crises, Ruptures: A Whole New Ball Game* (2004), *Crisis Management in the Twenty-First Century: 'Unthinkable' Events in 'Inconceivable' Contexts* (2007) and *A New Cosmology of Risks and Crises* (2009). Across these papers, Lagadec examined the epistemological challenges posed by a new class of events and the implications for how societies model, prepare for and respond to crises. If as we are constantly being told, history is cyclical rather than linear, then it may well be that the unthinkable and unprecedented events that we are currently experiencing are simply those from a previous iteration rewritten for the AI generation.

I hope that the sections in this month's Global Risk Review are of interest and value, and I look forward to seeing you on some of the many events that we will continue to be holding over the coming months.

Best regards,



David Rubens

Executive Director, ISRM

20th February 2026

OVERVIEW

The February Global Risk Review Report delivers concise, strategic analysis of key geopolitical, economic and humanitarian developments shaping global stability. This edition presents a comprehensive assessment of the global risk landscape as the world enters 2026. This situation reveals a convergence of geopolitical, economic, environmental and technological pressures that collectively signal a transition toward a more volatile and fragmented international order.

The sessions reinforced the forum's core purpose: **to provide a space for informed, diverse and concise contributions that collectively enhance understanding of global risk trajectories.** As participation continues to broaden, the Global Risk Forum remains committed to maintaining an inclusive, forward-looking dialogue that captures both immediate developments and longer-term systemic trends.

KEY MESSAGES

GEOPOLITICAL VOLATILITY is accelerating, driven by unilateral state actions and weakening adherence to international law

FOOD SECURITY is approaching a critical tipping point with collapsing farm viability and structural market distortions.

REGIONAL CONFLICTS remain entrenched (Ukraine, Gaza, Sudan, Syria, Venezuela) with limited prospects for near term resolution.

CRITICAL INFRASTRUCTURE remains vulnerable, especially power grids, water systems and digital networks.

U.S. DOMESTIC TENSIONS are escalating, particularly around immigration enforcement, federal-state conflict and civil liberties.

AI EMERGES AS A TRANSFORMATIVE BUT DESTABILISING FORCE, raising concerns about governance, misinformation and electoral integrity.

ECONOMIC PRESSURES PERSIST including slow global growth, trade uncertainty and supply chain fragility.

COMMUNITY-LEVEL RESILIENCE PROVES ESSENTIAL, often outperforming formal institutional preparedness.

CLIMATE AND ENVIRONMENTAL RISKS intensify with extreme weather and infrastructure failures.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Global Risk Review Report illustrates a world entering 2026 under conditions of heightened geopolitical volatility and accelerating technological disruption. Across regions, the early months of the year have been marked by assertive state behaviour, deepening domestic polarisation and the emergence of overlapping crises that increasingly interact across different sectors such as in political, economic, environmental and technological domains.

This report highlights the ISRM's continued role as a platform for structured, multidisciplinary analysis, while bringing together practitioners, analysts and policymakers to examine evolving risks and identify strategic implications. The discussions reflect a global environment in which traditional assumptions about stability, governance and international cooperation are being challenged by rapid shifts in power, climate driven shocks and the transformative impact of Artificial Intelligence.

In conclusion, this edition serves as a testament to underscore the need for adaptive governance and practical resilience-building as states, organisations and communities confront a complex and interconnected risk landscape.

A special edition presenting the 2026 Global Risk Outlook will be featured in this issue at the end of the Global Risk Review Report.

INTRODUCTION

The Global Risk Review Report is characterised by an assertive period of unilateral actions and weakening adherence to international law. Conflicts across Ukraine, Gaza, Sudan, Syria and the Indo-Pacific remain unresolved. While U.S. interventions in Venezuela and heightened tensions with Iran and Cuba raise concerns about escalation and alliance cohesion. The rules-based international system faces mounting strain as multilateral institutions struggle to maintain relevance.

More precisely, the United States experiences widespread protests linked to immigration enforcement and political polarisation. The United Kingdom faces infrastructure failures and potential election disruptions. Iran, Nepal, Indonesia and Serbia grapple with protests, governance crises and public distrust, reflecting a broader global pattern of institutional fatigue.

Global economic growth forecasts remain restrained, weighed down by trade uncertainty, complex sanctions regimes together with persistent supply chain vulnerabilities. Food security emerges as a critical global risk with evidence of systemic market failure and declining farm viability. Moreover, corporate consolidation across strategic sectors—including mining, semiconductors and digital infrastructure—raises concerns about systemic resilience and concentrated power.

Environmental and climate-related risks also intensify, with severe fires, floods, extreme winter events and accelerating Antarctic ice melt underscoring the growing impact of climate instability.

Technological disruption, particularly the rapid expansion of Artificial Intelligence, introduces both transformative potential and significant governance challenges. AI-driven manipulation, deepfakes and vulnerabilities in electronic voting systems threaten democratic processes, while concentrated control of AI capabilities raises ethical and strategic concerns.

Amid these pressures, community resilience and local capacity emerge as essential stabilising forces. Field observations highlight the importance of grassroots response networks, regional cooperation and practical preparedness. The ISRM's expanding global footprint reflects growing demand for structured resilience frameworks and professional collaboration.

Overall, 2026 depicts a world in a state of polycrisis—where multiple, overlapping risks reinforce one another and challenge traditional mechanisms of governance and stability. It is mandatory to establish strategic foresight and adaptive leadership in order to navigate the year ahead.

GEOPOLITICAL ESCALATION AND EROSION OF INTERNATIONAL NORMS

THE RULE OF LAW WEAKENS AS GLOBAL STABILITY UNRAVELS

Recent developments surrounding President Donald Trump's actions and rhetoric have generated widespread reaction, though these events align closely with long-established patterns of behaviour. The surprise expressed across parts of the Western political landscape highlights a deeper failure to acknowledge the sustained public support for authoritarian leadership styles within democratic societies.

The growing appeal of populist and far-right figures reflects a broader erosion of trust in the rule of law. Legal systems are increasingly perceived as instruments used selectively by powerful actors for personal or political advantage, rather than as impartial frameworks governing conduct. This perception has weakened institutional legitimacy and enabled leaders who openly disregard legal and ethical norms.

A notable inconsistency exists in international discourse. Democratic states frequently condemn perceived abuses within allied or democratic systems, while remaining comparatively silent on systemic violations committed by authoritarian regimes and non-state actors. This selective outrage undermines moral credibility and reinforces narratives of hypocrisy in global governance.

Strategic interests, particularly access to natural resources such as oil, minerals, and critical materials, continue to shape geopolitical behaviour. Greenland has emerged as a focal point in this context, triggering renewed urgency around defence spending and strategic positioning. This shift has altered long-standing security assumptions and disrupted what has been perceived as an extended post-war peace dividend.

The current moment is increasingly viewed as a necessary wake-up call. Decades of relative stability have fostered complacency in defence readiness and fiscal discipline across parts of Europe. Comparisons between countries that prioritised long-term reserves and those that accumulated substantial debt underscore the consequences of sustained policy choices driven by short-term comfort rather than strategic resilience.

In summary, these dynamics point to a changing global environment marked by weakened legal norms, heightened strategic competition and growing pressure on democratic institutions to adapt to a more contested and less predictable world order.



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GLOBAL RISK OUTLOOK: GEOPOLITICAL FLASHPOINTS

The current international landscape is moving toward a polycrisis environment, characterised by multiple overlapping risks that could impact global stability, economic performance and geopolitical dynamics. Several regions are attracting significant attention due to escalating tensions and strategic uncertainties.

Key areas of concern include Venezuela and Greenland, where U.S. interventions and claims of strategic interest have raised questions regarding NATO involvement and alliance cohesion. The status of Greenland, as a Danish territory and NATO member, highlights the complexities of balancing national ambitions with alliance obligations.

The Middle East, particularly Iran, remains a high-risk zone with domestic unrest intersecting with broader geopolitical dynamics. Competing interests of regional and global powers create an unpredictable environment, where alliances and actions by external actors could have far-reaching consequences.

In East Asia, the Taiwan Strait represents a potential hotspot. The interactions between China and Taiwan, along with U.S. involvement, present risks not only to regional security but also to international trade and global economic stability.

India emerges as a pivotal actor in global strategic calculations. Current policies prioritise caution, maintaining balanced relations with the U.S., BRICS nations and Middle Eastern partners. Environmental and hydro political pressures, particularly in northern India with potential disruptions from upstream Chinese infrastructure projects and river water disputes with Pakistan, add another layer of complexity.

The evolving currency dynamics and exploration of alternatives to the U.S. dollar, such as BRICS-backed initiatives, are also likely to influence global financial markets, trade and economic governance over the next 12–24 months.

Finally, these developments underscore the need for strategic foresight and coordinated policy planning to navigate the interconnected crises shaping the global landscape. Monitoring these risk drivers will not only be critical for anticipating impacts on international security, but also economics and governance.

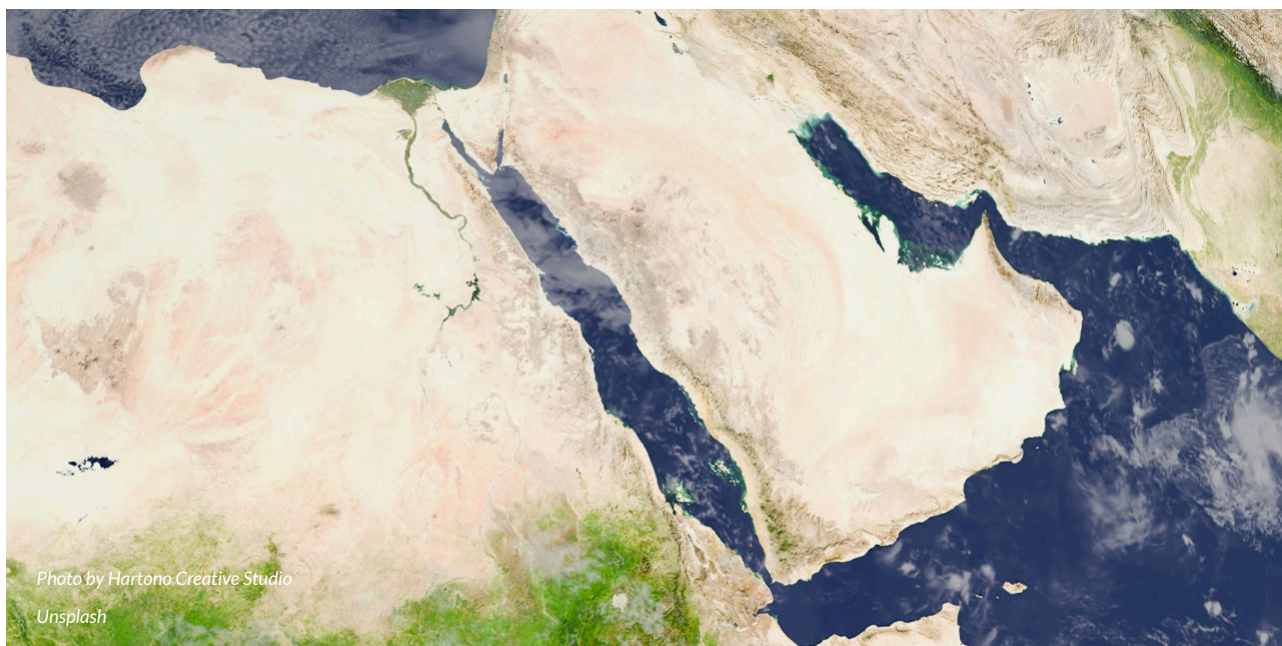


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RISING GLOBAL TENSIONS AND THE IMPERATIVE FOR STRATEGIC INFLUENCE

Global political and social instability is accelerating with civil conflicts and societal fractures becoming increasingly pronounced in multiple regions. Current developments in the United States, including escalating domestic unrest, illustrate the potential for localised conflicts to evolve into broader crises with international ramifications.

There is a pressing need for collective action among thought leaders, academics and policy influencers to address emerging risks. Coordinated efforts can provide guidance, advocacy and intervention strategies that help mitigate potential destabilisation before it escalates into widespread violence or systemic collapse.

Europe and other regions face particular risks if proactive engagement is not pursued. Historical precedents demonstrate that populations who fail to mobilise early in response to rising authoritarianism or social unrest are often the first to experience severe consequences. Maintaining vigilance and organised influence is therefore essential for both regional and global security.

Strategic focus must extend beyond political or ideological labelling. Emphasis should be placed on policy-driven action, lobbying at high levels and building networks of resilience. Addressing potential flashpoints, such as Greenland or other geopolitically sensitive areas, will require careful preparation and coordinated advocacy to safeguard both populations and institutional stability.

The current environment underscores the urgency of proactive engagement and the cultivation of influence to navigate a world increasingly shaped by complex crises and the risk of conflict.

POWER, INFLUENCE AND EMERGING GLOBAL RISKS

Recent developments underscore the persistence of historical patterns in international relations with actions in Greenland, the Arctic and other strategic regions reflecting long-standing tendencies of major powers to prioritise self-interest over alliance commitments. Awareness of historical precedents, including past territorial acquisitions and regional interventions, provides critical context for understanding current geopolitical manoeuvres.

Asia's role in global power dynamics continues to evolve. India and China remain cautiously observant, maintaining a measured approach amid shifting international pressures, while Japan is asserting regional influence through strategic initiatives such as deep-ocean resource exploration. These developments highlight the interplay between national security priorities and broader economic ambitions in a multipolar world.

Domestic governance and societal cohesion face challenges as debates over free speech, anti-Semitism and civil liberties intensify. Recent events in Australia, including public discourse surrounding the Adelaide Writers' Festival and legislative responses to social incidents, illustrate the complexities of balancing security, societal values and the protection of civil liberties in diverse populations.

Environmental and resilience considerations are increasingly central to strategic planning. Research on Antarctic ice dynamics, oceanic ecological impacts, as well as planetary boundaries emphasises the importance of integrating ecological resilience into both organisational and national risk frameworks. Current tools for risk management must be reassessed to ensure effectiveness in a fragmented, multipolar and ecologically complex global landscape.

In conclusion, the intersection of geopolitical manoeuvring, societal dynamics and ecological resilience underscores the necessity for informed, strategic engagement at both national and international levels to anticipate and mitigate emerging global risks.

RISING WARS, FAILING ORDER

The opening weeks of the year have seen an extraordinary acceleration of global instability, with military action in Venezuela and escalating unrest across the Middle East. Rather than the prospect of a single global war, the greater concern lies in the proliferation of overlapping regional conflicts that risk reinforcing one another and overwhelming existing diplomatic and security frameworks.

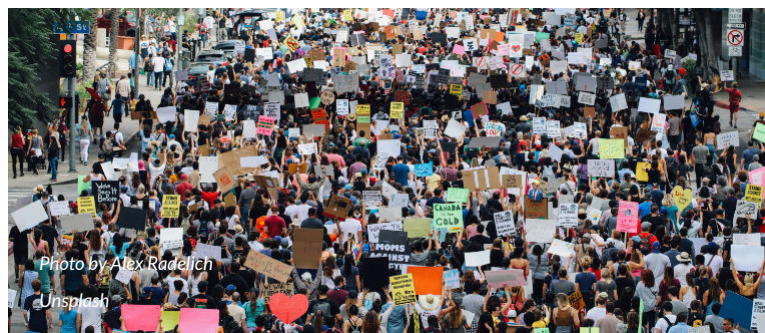
Significant volatility is evident in Iran as well, where large-scale protests are reportedly placing severe pressure on the regime, alongside renewed fighting in Syria involving government forces and Kurdish groups. These developments point to a wider pattern of state fragility and internal conflict, occurring in parallel rather than in isolation.

United States actions in Venezuela have underscored a shift away from coordinated strategy toward unilateral operations. The absence of consultation, long-term planning or alliance management has amplified concerns about competence and predictability. While tactical lessons from past interventions may have been partially absorbed, the broader strategic consequences remain largely unaddressed.

Confidence in the rules-based international system continues to erode. NATO's credibility as a collective security guarantor is increasingly questioned, prompting discussion of alternative arrangements such as a more Europe-centric 'NATO 2.0'. These debates reflect doubts about capability, political will and cohesion within existing institutions.

Multilateral structures, including the United Nations, are widely viewed as losing relevance in the management of conflict. The prevailing perception is a shift toward self-interested national strategies with collective norms and enforcement mechanisms steadily weakening.

Overall, the global landscape is characterised by leadership deficits, institutional fragmentation and a growing normalisation of disorder. The combination of regional conflict escalation and declining respect for international norms signals a profound and potentially enduring transformation in global affairs.



RISING GLOBAL CIVIL UNREST AND POLITICAL VOLATILITY

Recent observations indicate an accelerating trend of civil unrest and political instability across multiple regions. In the United Kingdom, discussions around potential election cancellations and growing political polarisation reflect a deepening divide, with public trust in governance increasingly strained. Small incidents have the potential to rapidly escalate into broader disturbances, highlighting systemic vulnerabilities in local and national political structures.

On the international front, uprisings in countries such as Iran continue to gain momentum despite government crackdowns. These events demonstrate the persistent tension between state authority and public mobilisation, with violent suppression proving insufficient to halt protest movements. Similar patterns are emerging in other regions, underscoring the interconnected nature of social and political unrest in the current global environment.

In the United States, localised incidents, including those in Minnesota, have acted as flashpoints, potentially influencing broader societal responses and political calculations. The period leading up to elections and legislative shifts adds complexity to governance and policy-making, increasing the likelihood of rapid decision-making and reactive measures.

Overall, the convergence of domestic political fragility, sustained protest movements and international instability highlights the importance of monitoring developments, maintaining open communication channels and simultaneously, reinforcing community resilience in both public and institutional contexts.

STRATEGIC DRIFT AND RISING UNCERTAINTY IN GLOBAL AFFAIRS

Recent developments have intensified perceptions of unpredictability in American foreign policy. Comparisons to earlier administrations underscore a sense that decision-making is increasingly influenced by short-term objectives rather than long-term strategy. This conduct raises questions about competence, planning, as well as international credibility. Historical examples, such as the influence of experienced diplomats and military leaders in previous administrations, contrast sharply with the current environment, where advisory structures are perceived as less robust.

Economic and trade concerns are prominent, particularly in the context of the pending Mercosur deal. Agricultural communities are closely monitoring the agreement due to potential impacts on food safety standards, market access and domestic production. Historical precedents, such as the Farm-to-Fork initiative following the 2001 foot-and-mouth outbreak, illustrate how effective policy responses can mitigate disruption, but upcoming decisions will test current governance capabilities.

Public discourse reflects broader unease about the strategic direction of global and domestic institutions. There is growing recognition that policy choices, whether in defence, trade or diplomacy, must account for both operational resilience and long-term stability. Perceptions of fragmented leadership and reactive decision-making contribute to a sense of vulnerability across multiple sectors.

To conclude, the current landscape is marked by heightened uncertainty, where historical lessons provide context but the pace and scope of change demand careful monitoring. Economic pressures, leadership perceptions and strategic decisions are converging to create an environment that will test institutional effectiveness in the months ahead.



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GEOPOLITICAL UNREST AROUND THE WORLD

FEDERAL ENFORCEMENT OPERATIONS AND ESCALATING TENSIONS IN MINNESOTA

A major incident occurred on January 7, 2026, when ICE agent shoots and kills a woman in Minneapolis during immigration enforcement. The fatal shooting of a 37-year-old Minneapolis resident by an Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) officer during a large federal operation triggered protests and heightened scrutiny of federal tactics and rules of engagement. Media footage and eyewitness accounts have raised questions about the circumstances of the encounter.

State and federal authorities have sharply clashed over investigative control following this shooting. Minnesota officials initially participated in a joint inquiry, but were later excluded. This shift of investigative authority to federal agencies has intensified criticism from local leaders concerned about transparency and autonomy.

The broader enforcement initiative, known as Operation Metro Surge, has involved multiple confrontations between federal officers and civilians, including additional shootings and injuries. Public responses have ranged from community protests to calls for accountability, with civil rights investigations now underway regarding the use of lethal force in at least one case.

These developments have also highlighted ongoing debates over constitutional authority and immunity, as state officials challenge federal assertions that immigration enforcement actions fall exclusively under federal jurisdiction. The resulting tensions underscore broader national disputes over law enforcement practices, civil liberties and the balance between public safety and community trust.



Photo by Spencer Bergen

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RISING U.S. DOMESTIC TENSIONS AMID IMMIGRATION ENFORCEMENT BACKLASH

The United States is experiencing significant domestic unrest linked to federal immigration enforcement operations, particularly involving Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE). Major protests have erupted nationwide in response to fatal shootings and aggressive enforcement tactics by federal agents during immigration operations. These events have accelerated public debate over the role, accountability and oversight of federal enforcement activities.

High profile fatal incidents, including the deaths of Renée Good and Alex Pretti during separate enforcement actions in Minneapolis, have sparked widespread criticism and protests in multiple cities, including San Francisco, Los Angeles, New York and Boston. Demonstrators have demanded accountability, policy reform and, in some cases, the abolishment of ICE itself, reflecting broad dissatisfaction with federal tactics.

Political responses have been deeply polarised. Local and state officials have condemned enforcement overreach and called for federal accountability, while some national figures and former leaders have characterised raids and shootings as reminiscent of authoritarian practices. These tensions have contributed to calls for legislative action and fed into broader debates over civil rights and civil liberties in immigration policy.

Federal enforcement strategies such as Operation Metro Surge and expanded immigration raids have drawn both support from some policymakers and intense backlash from communities, advocacy groups and civil rights observers. Recent federal adjustments – including the drawdown of some enforcement personnel in Minneapolis – reflect ongoing pressure and evolving operational approaches amid sustained public scrutiny.

Public opinion trends show increasing scepticism about current immigration enforcement frameworks, with some surveys indicating that more Americans now support structural change within federal enforcement agencies than oppose it. This shift underscores the growing political salience of immigration policy and its potential influence on broader national debates and future elections.

Overall, the intersection of federal enforcement actions, public protest movements and political dialogue underscores a heightened period of domestic tension and policy contention in the United States.



U.S. ACTION IN VENEZUELA AND CHALLENGES TO INTERNATIONAL LAW

The U.S. military operation in Venezuela in January 2026 – involving strikes on Caracas and the capture of Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro and his wife – has provoked widespread debate over its legality and implications for the post-World War II international order. The United Nations Charter prohibits the threat or use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of any state, except in self-defence or with Security Council authorisation. The Venezuelan government and many international legal experts argue the U.S. action lacked both conditions, constituting a violation of fundamental principles of international law and sovereignty.

The UN Secretary-General António Guterres expressed deep concern that the operation could intensify instability in Venezuela and undermine regional peace, emphasising that respect for legal norms should guide responses to conflicts. Several Security Council members – including states from Latin America and beyond – labelled the intervention a dangerous precedent, highlighting divisions within the international community regarding both legality and broader geopolitical consequences.

Legal analysis by scholars and human rights organisations underscores that unilateral enforcement of domestic criminal indictments abroad does not override prohibitions on the use of force under the Charter. Without UN authorisation or a clear case of self-defence, extraterritorial military operations against a recognised government contravene long-standing rules designed to prevent aggression and protect sovereign equality.

The episode raises broader questions about the effectiveness of the UN Charter's framework when major powers act without international consensus and about avenues for redress or accountability for states whose sovereignty is challenged. Venezuela and other critics maintain that available international mechanisms – including UN forums and international courts – remain essential venues for justice and the reinforcement of legal norms, even as geopolitical realities test their influence.



Photo by Andrés Silva

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PERFORMATIVE GEOPOLITICS AND THE RISKS OF MISREAD STRATEGY

Recent discussion highlighted a growing perception that elements of U.S. foreign policy operate through calculated pressure rather than sustained military engagement. In fact, rhetoric surrounding intervention—whether directed at Iran, Venezuela or Greenland—often appears designed to extract concessions or reinforce negotiating leverage, rather than signal full-scale commitment. The pattern reflects a broader ‘America First’ framework in which transactional outcomes outweigh traditional alliance structures.

Such tactics can produce short-term strategic gains, particularly when adversaries and allies understand the boundaries of escalation. Limited retaliatory actions, symbolic strikes or calibrated responses may serve domestic political narratives while avoiding systemic conflict. However, this approach relies heavily on shared assumptions and predictable signalling.

The central risk emerges when actors misinterpret intent or fail to recognize the informal ‘rules of the dance’. Performative escalation—similar in concept to Cold War deterrence dynamics—depends on mutual understanding of limits. It is significant to stress that a miscalculation or overreaction from established patterns, can rapidly transform symbolic confrontation into genuine instability.

At the same time, domestic political developments across multiple democracies reveal tensions over electoral timing and public trust. These debates intersect with broader concerns about governance legitimacy and institutional resilience.

Overall, the current environment is characterised less by clear strategic realignment and more by sustained pressure tactics and high-stakes signalling. Stability will depend on whether political actors continue to operate within understood parameters—or inadvertently step beyond them.

UK FACES JUDICIAL REFORM AND GROWING INFRASTRUCTURE STRAIN

Within the criminal courts, proposals to expand the use of single-judge proceedings in place of jury trials have generated debate. Advocates of reform mention efficiency and case backlogs, particularly amid rising caseloads involving serious offences, including sexual violence. However, concerns have been raised regarding the erosion of the long-standing principle that individuals are judged by their peers.

The magistracy has emphasised the value of collective deliberation. In magistrates' courts, decisions are typically made by panels of three locally appointed magistrates, ensuring discussion, debate and voting before judgment. This structure provides both local representation and a safeguard against unilateral decision-making. Replacing multi-person deliberation with a single judicial authority raises questions about resilience in decision-making and the preservation of public confidence in fairness.

An extended cold spell has exposed structural weaknesses in London's aging infrastructure. Approximately 300 water main bursts have been recorded, leaving entire housing estates without water for multiple days. Vulnerable populations have been particularly affected.

Much of London's underground water system dates back to the Victorian era. Temperature fluctuations continue to stress these legacy systems, highlighting the long-term consequences of deferred infrastructure modernisation.

Parallel planning efforts are underway to address worst-case national scenarios, including prolonged regional or nationwide power outages lasting up to five days. Such contingencies would disrupt banking systems, telecommunications, retail transactions, sanitation systems, as well as healthcare operations. While extended outages remain low-probability events, resilience planning has expanded to account for cyber threats and systemic vulnerabilities in the national power grid.



Exercises coordinated through central government frameworks have emphasised preparedness for high-impact, low-frequency events. The objective is to anticipate cascading failures and ensure continuity of essential services under severe disruption. International developments continue to influence domestic security assessments. Discussions in policy and professional circles reflect concern about escalating global tensions, shifting alliance dynamics and the potential for expanded conflict zones. While forecasts remain speculative, contingency planning increasingly incorporates scenarios involving broader regional instability in Europe and beyond.

UK LOCAL ELECTIONS AND GLOBAL GEOPOLITICAL VOLATILITY

The upcoming UK local elections in May 2026 face uncertainty as Prime Minister Keir Starmer has delegated authority to local councils to decide whether to hold polls. To date, 20 Labour-controlled councils have indicated they may postpone elections, although this could shift depending on public sentiment. The internal dynamics of Reform, including the recruitment of former Conservative MPs, may influence voter behaviour and party popularity, creating potential political risks for both local and national governance.

On the international front, tensions surrounding Iran remain high. U.S. military movements, including deployment of an aircraft carrier and repositioning of personnel in the Gulf, signal ongoing strategic pressure. Potential targeted actions against Iranian installations carry significant risk of unintended consequences, potentially strengthening domestic support for the Iranian government and complicating regional stability.

Overall, both domestic political uncertainties in the UK and fluid geopolitical developments in the Middle East underscore a period of heightened strategic risk and volatility, necessitating close monitoring of emerging political and security trends.



Photo by Mircea Solomiea

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EUROPE'S RISING THREAT: MANIPULATION AND COERCION

Concerns were raised about emerging efforts to influence democratic processes through advanced digital manipulation. Reports of Artificial Intelligence being used to generate targeted deepfake content in support of a potential Polish exit from the European Union illustrate how political persuasion is becoming more personalised and difficult to regulate, particularly among younger voting demographics.

Unpredictability in United States political behaviour continues to shape global decision-making. Described as deliberately chaotic, recent actions—including abrupt tariff announcements—demonstrate how uncertainty itself is being used as leverage. The rapid accommodation of these measures by international partners highlights the extent to which strategic fear and economic dependence influence policy outcomes.

Maritime security tensions were underscored by the seizure of a Russian-flagged tanker in the North Atlantic, with confirmed involvement from both the United States and the United Kingdom. This incident points to an increasingly assertive posture in enforcing sanctions and controlling strategic supply routes, even at the risk of escalation.

Military capacity constraints within Europe remain a significant concern. Awareness of the reduced size of the United Kingdom's standing army has reinforced broader anxieties about readiness, sustainability and the gap between political commitments and operational capability.

Economic pressures are also intensifying around trade policy. The pending European Union vote on the Mercosur agreement has generated strong resistance, particularly from agricultural sectors concerned about competition and regulatory divergence in food safety standards. National governments face mounting pressure to reconcile domestic commitments with broader EU trade objectives.



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From another perspective, growing scrutiny from European partners has highlighted long-standing vulnerabilities in national security and defence. Expectations for increased investment and capability development are rising, reinforcing the reality that neutrality alone no longer shields smaller states from strategic risk in an increasingly contested environment.

EUROPE STRAINS UNDER WINTER SHOCK AND GEOPOLITICAL PRESSURE

Across Northern and Western Europe, persistent and intense winter conditions have strained logistics networks and airline operations. Major aviation hubs, including Amsterdam's Schiphol and several German airports, have faced flight delays and cancellations amid heavy snow, ice and freezing rain.

De-icing fluid shortages—exacerbated by high demand and logistical bottlenecks—have limited the ability to maintain safe aircraft operations, contributing to widespread schedule disruptions and compounding systemic strain on carriers. These conditions illustrate vulnerabilities in preparedness and risk management for extreme weather events that are occurring with greater frequency in recent years.

Supermarkets and ground transport have also been affected by cold-related delays and infrastructure challenges, stretching already fragile supply chains. The situation underscores the broader economic consequences of climatic extremes and the trade-off between investing in resilience and accepting some degree of risk and disruption.

Political and strategic pressures continue to influence Europe's relationship with North American allies. Recent diplomatic friction has emerged around defence commitments and collective security arrangements with some European capitals expressing concern about the reliability of shared obligations under existing frameworks. Reports indicate that several countries are reassessing aspects of alliance cooperation, reflecting broader debates over burden-sharing and strategic autonomy.

The strategic landscape is further shaped by long-standing debates over regime change and great-power behaviour. While the historical record shows that major powers have engaged in interventionist policies for over a century, recent actions abroad have prompted debate across Europe and beyond about the norms governing international conduct and the future of multilateral institutions. Discussions around these themes often invoke comparisons to earlier epochs of global rivalry and contestation, highlighting enduring tensions between national interests and collective stability.

Europe's current challenges—from weather-related disruptions to transatlantic strategic debates—highlight the multiple vectors of stress facing governments and industries. It is important to stress that immediate operational responses to extreme winter conditions will remain a priority.



UKRAINE: ESCALATION WITHOUT CERTAINTY

Ukrainian military effectiveness remains high, reflected in daily battlefield successes and a growing number of prisoners of war. These outcomes point to systemic strain within Russian forces and indicate that operational momentum is more contested than surface-level narratives suggest.

Beyond the battlefield, unconventional information and survival networks have expanded significantly. Support materials aimed at draft-age individuals and vulnerable populations within and beyond Russia have circulated widely, prompting repeated reprinting in multiple languages. This highlights both the scale of foreign recruitment and the extent to which non-traditional actors are being significant influences.

The international security framework surrounding Ukraine remains ambiguous. United States assurances of protection continue to lack clear definition, leaving uncertainty over whether guarantees imply direct military involvement or more limited forms of support. This ambiguity complicates strategic planning and risk assessment for all parties involved.

Historical commitments continue to shape current perceptions. Security assurances provided to Ukraine following the relinquishment of nuclear weapons remain a central reference point, reinforcing arguments that deterrence dynamics might have altered the trajectory of the conflict.

Finally, differences in military doctrine are increasingly apparent. United States strategy is widely viewed as favouring overwhelming force rather than incremental engagement, raising questions about feasibility and alignment with current operational realities. Overall, these factors underscore a conflict that is intensifying beneath the surface while remaining strategically unresolved.

NEPAL FACES MOUNTING POLITICAL INSTABILITY

Nepal's political environment remains highly volatile following the mass Gen Z protests in September 2025, which forced a government resignation and led to the formation of an interim administration tasked with managing a roadmap toward elections scheduled for 5 March 2026.

Mainstream political parties, including long established forces, have expressed significant concerns about security and the electoral environment. Many remain unconvinced that conditions exist for free and fair elections, the presence of looted arms and distrust between political actors and interim authorities.

The interim government has taken steps to revise electoral procedures, expand voter registration—including lowering the voting age—and deploy security personnel to support election logistics. However, deep political mistrust and fragmented support among major parties continue to complicate preparations.

Beyond procedural uncertainty, Nepal's political transition has exposed wider legitimacy challenges within the democratic system. Persistent factional disputes, public frustration with corruption and divided youth movements have weakened confidence in traditional political elites and raised questions about the ability of elections alone to deliver meaningful reform.

Regional dynamics further complicate the landscape with neighbouring powers monitoring developments closely. India's and China's strategic interests in Nepal's stability add external pressure to an already fragile domestic context, highlighting the geopolitical stakes of Nepal's political trajectory.

In conclusion, Nepal's current political climate is defined by institutional fragility, uncertainty over the conduct of elections and an electorate divided between demands for systemic change and enduring partisan loyalties. The coming months will be critical in determining whether the nation can navigate this transition without exacerbating instability or undermining democratic processes.

INDONESIA: RISING DOMESTIC PRESSURE

Indonesia has not only experienced a politically and socially significant period marked by legal changes and judicial controversy, but also disaster response criticism and proposed electoral reforms. While these developments may appear distinct, together they point to mounting tension between government institutions and segments of civil society, including students, activists and media organisations.

A newly implemented criminal code, originally passed three years ago, has drawn substantial criticism. Key provisions introduce jail sentences for public criticism of the president and state authorities, impose penalties for insufficient notice prior to demonstrations and criminalise relations outside of marriage. Critics argue that these measures risk constraining press freedom and civic expression in what remains a socially conservative but politically dynamic environment. The timing of implementation is particularly sensitive, following large-scale protests in August related to lawmaker allowances that escalated into significant security concerns.

Simultaneously, a high-profile corruption trial involving a former education minister has commenced. The individual, widely regarded as a technocratic and reform-oriented figure under a previous administration, is perceived by some observers as the subject of politically motivated prosecution. Allegations of renewed judicial politicisation have resurfaced, reinforcing longstanding concerns regarding institutional independence.

Public frustration has grown following the government's slow response to a climate-induced disaster in Sumatra and Aceh, which left 1,300 dead and thousands displaced. Proposals to replace direct elections for regional leaders with appointments have also fuelled worries about democratic backsliding.

In summary, these developments heighten the risk of renewed civic mobilisation with legal, political and disaster-related grievances potentially driving public demonstrations in the coming months.



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NEPAL'S POLITICAL FRAGMENTATION AND THE BROADER CRISIS OF GOVERNANCE

Nepal faces heightened political uncertainty ahead of the upcoming March elections, as internal divisions within the Nepali Congress—historically the country's oldest and largest political party—intensify. A leadership dispute between former Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba and emerging figure Gagan Kumar Thapa has led to internal disciplinary action and contributed to party fragmentation at a critical pre-election juncture. The split places additional pressure on candidate nominations and electoral strategy.

The fragmentation comes amid broader concerns over governance and institutional stability. The interim government has sought to manage tensions and maintain coalition cohesion, yet the current environment reflects deeper structural volatility. Questions around political accountability, party unity and leadership credibility are shaping public perception as the election approaches.

External geopolitical dynamics further complicate the domestic landscape. Developments involving major powers, particularly the United States, continue to influence political narratives in developing states reliant on Western partnerships and governance frameworks. International promotion of 'good governance' standards—often advanced through multilateral institutions—intersects with domestic political disputes, sometimes amplifying public scepticism or political contestation.

More broadly, the discussion reflects a global pattern of declining public confidence in leadership. Across multiple regions, concerns have emerged regarding the quality and resilience of political institutions compared to previous decades. Divergent expectations toward major democracies compared to authoritarian states also continue to shape international reactions to conflict and human rights concerns.



Overall, Nepal's current political fragmentation mirrors a wider period of global transition marked by institutional strain and evolving standards of governance in an increasingly volatile geopolitical environment.

AUSTRALIA UNDER PRESSURE AT HOME AND ABROAD

The bushfires in Victoria remain extensive and are expected to generate prolonged economic, environmental and social consequences. Beyond immediate devastation, emerging research suggests a complex global climate interaction: reductions in industrial pollution in China may be diminishing atmospheric particulates that previously reflected solar radiation, potentially contributing to higher regional temperatures in Australia. While this hypothesis requires further scientific validation, it highlights the interconnected and sometimes counterintuitive nature of climate mitigation efforts.

The forthcoming Federal Royal Commission into the Bondi attack continues to generate public debate. Criticism has emerged from multiple directions regarding the selection of leadership, reflecting polarised views on perceived political alignment. Concurrently, cultural tensions have intensified following the removal of a pro-Palestinian writer from the Adelaide Writers' Festival, prompting nearly 90 authors to withdraw in protest, including journalist Peter Greste, formerly detained in Egypt while reporting for Al Jazeera.

Discussion surrounding the Commission's scope centres on whether its mandate should focus narrowly on anti-Semitism or more broadly on the underlying causes of declining social cohesion. Questions have been raised about whether testimony on experiences of hate alone will sufficiently address root drivers of extremism and division. As with previous Australian Royal Commissions, attention is turning to the terms of reference and, critically, whether recommendations will translate into sustained policy implementation.

Broader geopolitical concerns are also shaping domestic perspectives. Recent U.S. interventions abroad have prompted reflection on historical patterns of power projection and alliance dynamics. The possibility that traditional allies could become subject to similar strategic pressure—highlighted by discussions surrounding Denmark and Greenland—has unsettled assumptions about long-standing partnerships.

At the systemic level, indications that the United States may withdraw from numerous international institutions, including UN-affiliated bodies, underscore perceptions of a weakening multilateral framework. This evolving landscape aligns with themes explored in Luke Kemp's 'Goliath's Curse', which examines the fragility of dominant powers and Ian Bremmer's 'GO', which anticipated a leaderless global order characterised by fragmentation rather than coordinated governance.

The effectiveness of domestic responses—both to natural hazard disasters and to social division—will depend not only on inquiry and analysis, but on implementation and sustained political will. Simultaneously, international uncertainty suggests a period of continued strategic recalibration in which established norms may no longer be assumed.



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ECONOMIC UNCERTAINTY AND MARKET FRAGILITY

KEY INSIGHTS:

GLOBAL TRADE AND GEOPOLITICAL UNCERTAINTY

The past year has been marked by significant uncertainty in global trade and international relations. A substantial proportion of exports rely on the United States, while imports constitute a major part of supply chains, making fluctuating tariffs and trade policy a critical concern. Uncertainty around the evolution of the North American Free Trade Agreement –currently known as Canada- United States- Mexico Agreement (CUSMA) –remains a central issue with potential implications for trade stability and regional economic planning.

Canada's proactive diplomatic and economic strategies, including the establishment of multiple free trade agreements and engagement with major economies have mitigated some risks. These agreements now encompass 51 countries representing over 60% of global GDP with recent expansions including India, projected to become one of the world's largest economies in the coming years.

Global geopolitical dynamics, including tensions in the Middle East, evolving relations with China and unpredictability in policy decisions, continue to add layers of complexity to international trade and economic forecasting. Recent oversight from judicial authorities provides some checks on unilateral executive actions, yet uncertainty persists.

Overall, navigating this rapidly changing environment requires vigilance, adaptability and strategic engagement with both established and emerging global partners to sustain economic resilience and mitigate risk.

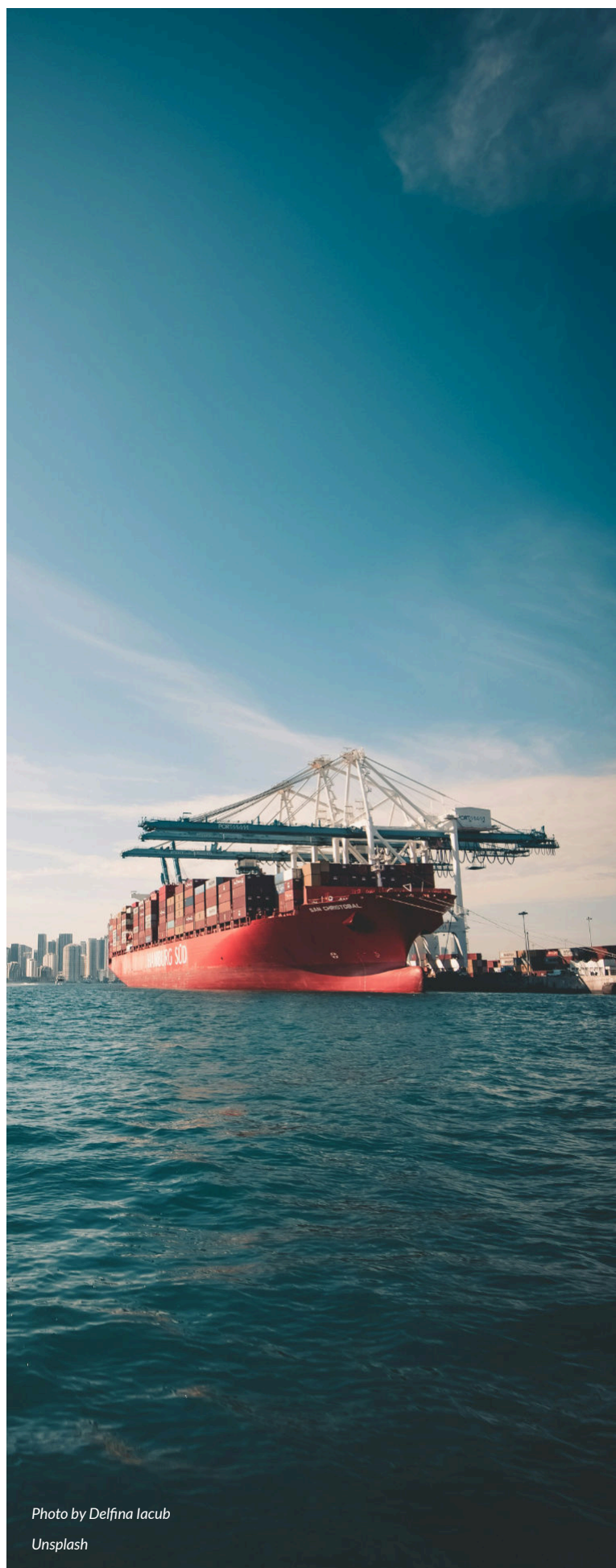


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AGRICULTURAL TRADE EXPOSURE AND CROSS-BORDER POLICY UNCERTAINTY IN NORTH AMERICA

The discussion assessed the vulnerability of Canada's agricultural sector to ongoing trade uncertainty, shifting U.S. policy settings and labour market disruption. Canada's farming strength is regionally concentrated, with Manitoba, Saskatchewan and Alberta forming the core of national grain and oilseed production, while Ontario plays a critical role in fruit, vegetable, corn and soy exports. These sectors remain highly exposed to external policy decisions, particularly those affecting trade with the United States and China.

Agricultural exports face compounding risks from unpredictable tariff regimes and unresolved trade negotiations. Soybean and corn exports have already been affected by volatility in relations with China, while uncertainty surrounding the next phase of the North American trade framework—anticipated mid-year—continues to delay planning and investment decisions. Seasonal dependency on imported fruits and vegetables from Mexico and South America during winter months further heightens exposure to trade friction and regulatory shifts.

The analysis highlighted structural dependence on the United States, which absorbs approximately 75% of Canadian exports and supplies roughly 60% of imports. This asymmetry amplifies economic risk when U.S. domestic policy changes—particularly immigration and labour enforcement—disrupt agricultural labour supply chains. North American farming systems rely heavily on seasonal migrant labour, primarily from Mexico and South America, under established and mutually beneficial temporary work arrangements. Disruptions to these arrangements create productivity shortfalls that are difficult to replace domestically.

Overall, the conversation concluded that agricultural resilience is being undermined less by market fundamentals than by policy unpredictability. Until greater clarity emerges on trade agreements, tariff structures and labour mobility frameworks in 2026, the sector will continue to operate under elevated uncertainty. Strategic stability, predictable cross-border cooperation and protection of seasonal labour pathways are identified as critical to sustaining food security, rural economies and last but not least, long-term agricultural competitiveness.



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RISING CORPORATE CONSOLIDATION AND THE GLOBAL RESILIENCE QUESTION

Recent reports of potential merger discussions between major mining firms such as Glencore and Rio Tinto have intensified concerns about accelerating corporate consolidation across critical sectors of the global economy. This development reflects a broader structural trend toward concentrated ownership in industries essential to energy transition, technology, food supply and industrial production.

Market consolidation is not limited to mining. Advanced semiconductor manufacturing is dominated by a small number of firms. Agricultural commodities and food trading are heavily concentrated among a handful of multinational corporations that collectively manage a significant share of global supply flows. Digital infrastructure, cloud computing and AI development are similarly concentrated within a limited group of dominant players.

Such consolidation raises questions about systemic resilience. When supply chains, production capacity and intellectual property are controlled by a narrow corporate base, disruptions—whether geopolitical, climatic, financial or cyber-related—can have amplified global consequences. Efficiency gains achieved through scale may reduce redundancy, but they may also diminish buffers that traditionally enhanced resilience.

Efforts to regulate emerging sectors, particularly AI and digital platforms, have highlighted tensions between regional regulatory authorities and major corporate actors. European Union regulatory initiatives, including frameworks for digital competition and AI governance, have faced pushback from U.S.-based technology firms and policymakers concerned about competitiveness and strategic advantage.

This dynamic reflects a broader pattern in which national economic strategy and corporate interests are increasingly intertwined. Large multinational corporations operate globally, yet their home governments often perceive them as strategic assets. Industrial policy debates in the United States over the past decade have increasingly emphasised maintaining technological and resource dominance, particularly in sectors tied to national security and economic leadership.

The trajectory toward greater consolidation raises long-term questions about competition, democratic oversight and the balance of power between governments and multinational enterprises. While antitrust frameworks remain active in various jurisdictions, enforcement at a truly global scale remains limited. As corporations expand across borders, regulatory regimes remain largely national or regional in scope.

The broader concern centres on whether concentrated corporate power may shape not only markets but also policy outcomes. Historical narratives linking national strength to corporate success continue to influence political thinking in several major economies.

The potential merger activity within the mining sector serves as a visible indicator of a larger structural shift. As consolidation deepens across strategic industries, policymakers will face increasing pressure to reconcile economic efficiency, national competitiveness and systemic resilience. The direction taken will significantly influence global supply stability and the distribution of economic power in the coming decades.

BUSINESS AS USUAL AMID ESCALATING SECURITY AND GEOPOLITICAL PRESSURES

Strategic alignment between Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates remains a focal point of regional security calculations. Of particular note are emerging reports of Saudi Arabia pursuing long-term defence arrangements with Pakistan. Such agreements could reshape regional military cooperation frameworks, particularly in relation to technology transfer, procurement diversification and strategic depth. These developments warrant close monitoring given their potential implications for Gulf security architecture and South Asian defence dynamics.

In Southern Mali, Jama'at Nusrat al-Islam wal-Muslimin (JNIM) continues to demonstrate operational flexibility. Following a campaign of fuel blockades described by the group as successful, attention has reportedly shifted toward targeting gold mining operations. This evolution in tactics signals a deliberate effort to disrupt state revenue streams and foreign commercial interests. For stakeholders in the extractive industries, the shift represents a material increase in operational risk and highlights the intersection between insurgency financing and economic infrastructure.

The United Kingdom remains affected by severe winter conditions, placing strain on emergency services and critical infrastructure. Within the health sector, coordination with the Welsh Ambulance Service Trust and other emergency response entities has emphasised the management of major incidents under compounded stress conditions.

A notable policy development for 2026 is the mandatory rollout of ProtectUK training across NHS trusts. This initiative integrates counter-radicalisation awareness and reporting protocols into routine institutional practice. The normalisation of such training reflects a broader shift in threat perception, embedding security awareness within frontline public service environments.



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Across regions, the prevailing pattern is continuity rather than disruption. Extremist groups are adapting tactics; Gulf states are recalibrating defence relationships and Western institutions are embedding resilience and counter-extremism measures into operational frameworks.

While individual developments may appear discrete, collectively they signal a sustained period of geopolitical competition and institutional hardening. The environment still remains complex, requiring sustained vigilance and cross-sector coordination.

RISING COSTS OF U.S. ISOLATIONISM: **ECONOMIC AND REPUTATIONAL RISKS**

The conversation highlighted growing concern over U.S. entry policies that may restrict access for individuals who publicly criticise the current administration. Such measures, once considered unlikely in the American context, signal a shift toward a more restrictive and security-focused posture.

Observers note that expanded visa limitations affecting dozens of countries could carry broader economic implications, particularly for tourism and international mobility. Reduced visitor flows may have downstream effects on employment, hospitality and related sectors, amplifying the economic consequences of tighter border controls.

These developments are viewed within the wider trajectory of renewed isolationist tendencies, including previous travel bans and selective refugee admissions. This approach has prompted debate over alignment with the long-standing image of the United States as a destination for opportunity and refuge.

The contrast between contemporary policy direction and historic symbolism—often associated with openness and welcome—has intensified discussion about national identity and the potential long-term impact on America’s international standing.



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TECHNOLOGICAL DISRUPTION AND AI GOVERNANCE CHALLENGES

AI AS A TRANSFORMATIVE AND DISRUPTIVE FORCE

The discussion highlighted the evolving role of Artificial Intelligence (AI) as both a disruptive and transformative technology. Historically, new inventions—ranging from the spinning jenny to the automobile—have initially been controlled by a limited number of individuals or entities, but broader access and societal integration eventually follow. AI is expected to follow a similar trajectory, albeit with significant transitional challenges, including disruptions to employment practices and social systems.

Current AI capabilities reveal both immense potential and clear limitations. While AI excels at depth of analysis and computational tasks, its ability to synthesise complex, multi-stranded global events or historical patterns remains constrained. Human generalists are still better equipped to integrate disparate streams of information into cohesive frameworks, whereas AI is primarily able to extrapolate once foundational analysis has been completed.

Applications in fields such as medicine, finance and industrial processes demonstrate AI's capacity to enhance efficiency and decision-making. However, questions of control, governance and ethical use persist, particularly as AI-enabled technologies expand into areas like autonomous systems and weaponry. The key challenge lies in ensuring that the deployment of AI serves societal benefit rather than consolidating power among a small elite or creating uncontrolled risks.

In summary, AI represents the 'disruptor of disruptors' offering transformative capabilities, while also necessitating careful management of risks, ethical boundaries and the balance between technological potential and human oversight.

AI INTEGRATION AND SOCIETAL IMPACT

Artificial intelligence (AI) is rapidly becoming an integral part of daily life with applications spanning education, research and professional workflows. Current use cases, such as AI-assisted teaching in schools or research automation, demonstrate significant efficiency gains, reducing the time required to process and analyse information. AI tools like Copilot and Gemini are increasingly adopted for these purposes, but outputs must be verified, highlighting the ongoing need for human oversight.

While AI offers substantial benefits, its integration presents challenges, including potential overreliance, normalisation of technology use and associated impacts on mental health, particularly among younger populations. The experience of technology adoption over the past century—ranging from computers to mobile devices—illustrates that transformative technologies often face scepticism initially but eventually become deeply embedded in society.

The foundational stage of AI development requires careful management to balance utility with risk. Regulatory guidance and educational frameworks are critical to ensure responsible use, particularly in sensitive areas such as mental health support. When integrated thoughtfully, AI can enhance human capability, support innovation and accelerate decision-making, but excessive dependence or uncritical use may introduce societal and ethical risks.

Overall, AI should be treated as a powerful tool that complements human intelligence rather than replacing it, requiring both strategic oversight and responsible governance to maximise benefits, while mitigating potential harm.

SOCIAL MEDIA GOVERNANCE AND DIGITAL LITERACY EMERGE AS POLICY PRIORITIES

Debate continues to intensify over the role of social media in political discourse, public safety and democratic engagement. While some governments, including Australia, have explored restrictive measures, broader concerns focus on the rapid expansion of digital platforms without corresponding investment in education, literacy or regulatory understanding.

A central challenge lies in the generational and institutional gap in digital competence. Policymakers, educators and parents have often struggled to keep pace with technological capabilities, leaving schools and civic institutions without structured frameworks for responsible use. The absence of sustained digital education has amplified risks related to misinformation, reputational harm and online manipulation.

Political communication provides a clear illustration of this dynamic. Campaign strategies designed to leverage platforms such as TikTok can quickly lose control once content is reinterpreted or weaponised by online audiences. Efforts to appear relatable or authentic may instead undermine credibility in an environment driven by rapid replication and satire.

Regulatory responses remain uneven. While calls for oversight have grown, implementation has proven complex. Age-verification measures and content controls are frequently circumvented through technical workarounds, highlighting a disconnect between legislative intent and technological realities. Moreover, the international nature of major platforms complicates national regulatory efforts.

Looking ahead, expanding youth political participation and the maturation of digitally native generations may gradually reshape policy approaches. In the interim, the balance between regulation, free expression and public protection remains unsettled, underscoring the need for coordinated, as well as adaptable governance frameworks.

AI AS AN ENABLER FOR KNOWLEDGE AND CREATIVITY

Artificial intelligence (AI), particularly tools such as ChatGPT, is increasingly serving as a powerful enabler for articulating complex ideas and synthesising knowledge. Its primary function lies in providing structured frameworks for thought, allowing users to examine, interrogate and refine concepts that may otherwise remain abstract or fragmented. By acting as a 'potter's wheel' for ideas, AI facilitates coherent expression and accelerates the process of transforming raw insights into well-formed outputs.

The value of AI resides in its role as a tool rather than a substitute for human reasoning. It allows for rapid aggregation of information, identification of relevant connections and preliminary structuring of arguments. Users can interrogate AI outputs, challenge assumptions and integrate personal experience or expert judgment to produce nuanced and contextually informed results. This interplay ensures that human creativity and critical thinking remain central to decision-making and learning.

While AI offers efficiency and scalability, caution is required to avoid overreliance or uncritical acceptance of generated outputs. AI reflects patterns and biases from the data it processes and its suggestions may not represent universal perspectives. Responsible use emphasises verification, thoughtful engagement, as well as the integration of independent judgment to maintain rigour and intellectual autonomy.

In summary, AI is a transformative enabler that supports knowledge articulation, research and innovation. When applied thoughtfully, it complements human expertise and provides a scalable framework for complex idea development without replacing the essential role of human insight.

LARGE LANGUAGE MODELS AND AI AS TOOLS FOR TRANSFORMATION

Artificial intelligence (AI), encompassing large language models and genetic algorithms, is evolving as a transformative tool rather than an autonomous solution. Ownership and expertise in AI are currently concentrated among a limited number of corporations, reflecting a form of corporate sovereignty, where the largest entities hold disproportionate influence. However, collaboration among these entities remains limited, constraining the potential for centralised control and ensuring diverse innovation continues to emerge.

Large language models excel at rapid data processing, content generation and information retrieval, but they are limited in synthesising complex, multi-faceted insights across diverse domains. AI struggles to interpret human biases and connect disparate ideas in the way human analysts and generalists can. These limitations underscore the importance of viewing AI as a tool to augment human judgment rather than replace it.

Practical applications demonstrate substantial utility in areas such as academic research, media content generation and market analysis, enabling efficiency gains and supporting informed decision-making. Nonetheless, overreliance on AI carries risks, including homogenisation of outputs, misinterpretation of flawed data and diminished critical thinking skills. Responsible integration requires structured interrogation of AI-generated insights and careful human oversight.

In conclusion, AI represents a powerful enabler of transformation and efficiency, but its deployment must remain guided by human expertise, critical assessment and ethical governance. When approached as a tool to enhance, rather than replace, human cognition, AI can deliver significant benefits across industries while mitigating associated risks.

THE TRANSFORMATIVE POTENTIAL AND RISKS OF AI

Artificial Intelligence (AI) is shaping a new era defined by algorithms that continuously influence perception, information flow and decision-making. Modern algorithms track user interactions across devices, creating patterns that guide content delivery, including news, images and videos. This personalisation can reinforce existing biases, shape political narratives and make distinguishing between real and AI-generated content increasingly difficult.

AI provides significant advantages when used as a tool across a wide range of sectors such as in business, research, academic work and political campaigns. It can summarise documents, generate presentations, produce videos and provide detailed information on nearly any topic, enabling efficiency and innovation. The technology also enables digital representations of individuals or ideas that persist in virtual spaces, expanding the concept of presence and communication in the digital age.

Despite these benefits, the challenges of controlling AI-generated content and the data it produces remain critical. Unchecked dissemination can contribute to misinformation, disinformation and even, manipulation of public opinion. Historical and recent examples, including electoral influence and social media-driven crises, highlight the importance of responsible oversight. Ensuring proper use of AI as a tool requires careful governance and an emphasis on verifying information before relying on it for decisions.

AI's potential is immense, but the balance between opportunity and risk depends on human management and conscious use in a rapidly evolving digital environment.

REGULATING AI AND ENSURING DATA INTEGRITY

The discussion highlighted the critical importance of establishing robust regulatory frameworks for artificial intelligence. Central to this is the management and control of data, ensuring both its authenticity and the accuracy of information disseminated across digital platforms.

Effective regulation must address the risks associated with misinformation, biased outputs and unverified content, while supporting the responsible development and deployment of AI technologies. Safeguards are essential to maintain public trust and ensure that AI serves as a tool for constructive innovation rather than a vector for harm.

The future of AI governance will depend on coordinated efforts to monitor, validate and oversee data circulation, creating systems that balance technological advancement with ethical and societal responsibility.

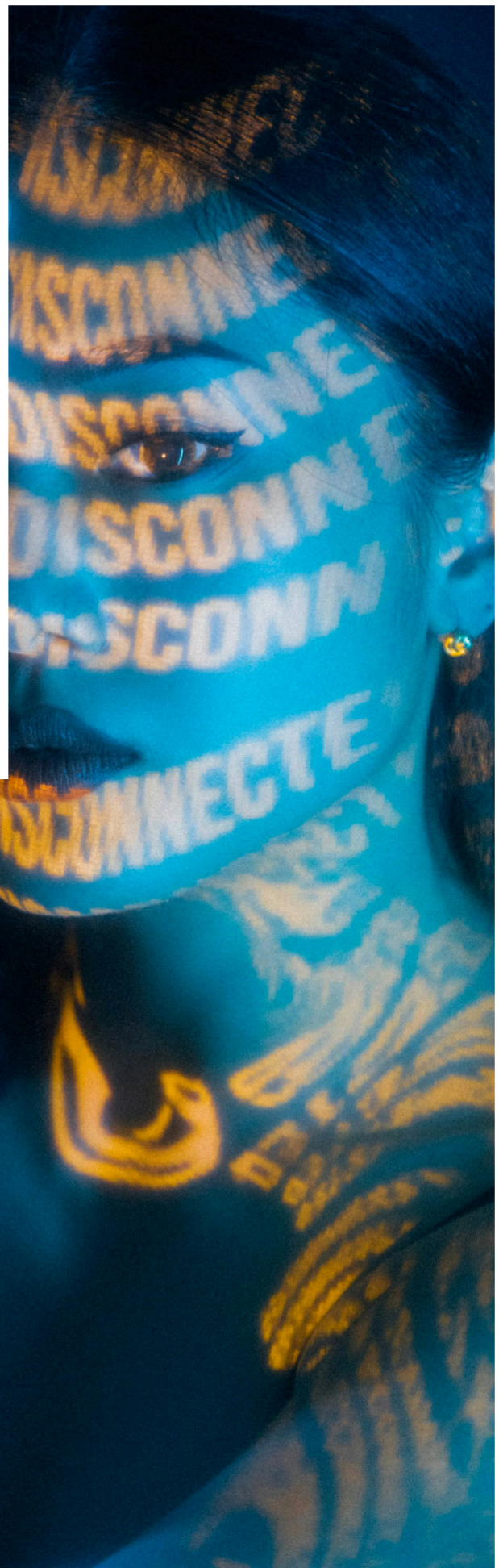


Photo by Chris Yang

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CLIMATE STRESS,
ENVIRONMENTAL
DEGRADATION
AND INFRASTRUCTURE
VULNERABILITY

GLOBAL ENVIRONMENTAL RISKS: **ANTARCTIC ICE MELT AND OCEANIC IMPACTS**

Recent observations from the Rothera UK Research Station in Antarctica have highlighted the emergence of ‘underwater tsunamis’, where large iceberg fragments—comparable in size to 20-story buildings—impact the ocean floor. This phenomenon is causing deeper, warmer waters to rise beneath the ice, accelerating ice melt and contributing to significant shifts in southern hemisphere weather patterns.

The oceans, as vast reservoirs of kinetic and thermal energy, play a critical role in regulating planetary climate. Even slight disruptions in oceanic ecological systems can cascade into unpredictable environmental consequences, affecting weather, marine ecosystems and global climate stability.

Concerns are growing regarding deep ocean floor mining and industrial trawling, which risk further destabilising fragile marine ecosystems. Such activities, driven by short-term economic incentives, could exacerbate the already accelerated changes in oceanic and atmospheric systems.

Monitoring these environmental developments is essential to understand cascading impacts on global climate, marine biodiversity and long-term planetary sustainability. Strategic interventions and international cooperation will be required to mitigate the risks associated with both natural ice melt dynamics and human-induced oceanic disruptions.

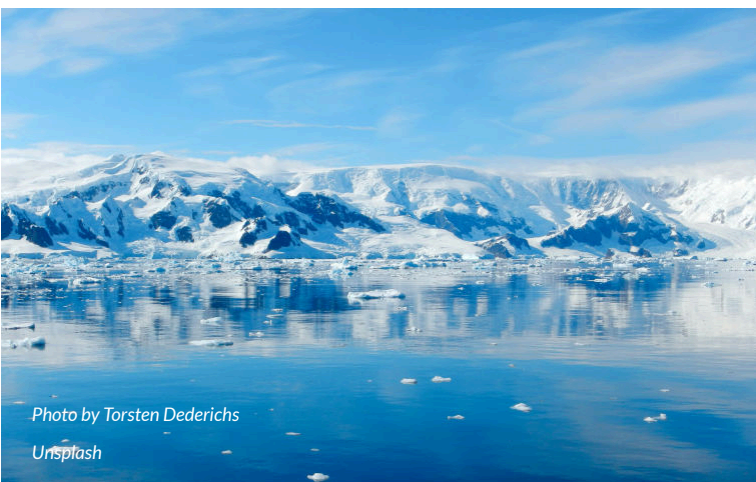


Photo by Torsten Dederichs

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AUSTRALIA UNDER PRESSURE: **CLIMATE, SECURITY AND SOCIAL STRAIN**

Australia is experiencing a period of intense environmental volatility, with extreme heatwaves, widespread fires and sudden floods occurring across multiple regions. Victoria, for instance, shifted rapidly from fire alerts to flood warnings, highlighting the unpredictability of climate-related hazards and their impact on communities and infrastructure.

Political tensions remain high in the federal parliament with recent legislative initiatives following the Bondi terrorist attacks revealing deep divisions. While parliament has been recalled to address urgent security legislation, opposition parties have signalled reluctance to support measures, reflecting ongoing disputes over policy priorities and societal focus.

Legislation addressing hate speech and discrimination has sparked debate over inclusivity, with critics noting the emphasis on anti-Semitism while other marginalised groups, including LGBTQ+ communities and religious minorities, argue for broader protections.

Social media regulation continues to challenge policymakers, as recent measures to restrict youth access have led to the cancellation of millions of accounts. The effectiveness of these actions remains uncertain and public discourse highlights tensions between governmental responsibility, parental oversight, as well as the broader societal implications of digital engagement.

In conclusion, these developments underscore Australia’s complex interplay of environmental, political and social pressures, requiring careful monitoring as the nation navigates both immediate crises and longer-term governance challenges.

AUSTRALIA FACES FIRE EMERGENCY AND RISING SECURITY TENSIONS

Melbourne is currently facing significant bushfire threats with active fire fronts on multiple sides of the city amid an intense heatwave. Evacuation orders have been issued in affected areas. Early reports indicate multiple fatalities, substantial destruction of homes and national parkland, as well as considerable impact on native wildlife. The unfolding situation has placed emergency services under sustained pressure and raised broader concerns about climate resilience and disaster preparedness.

The Bondi terrorist attack will now be examined through an Australian Federal Royal Commission. New South Wales has elected to stand down its own planned inquiry in favour of a Commonwealth-led process. The consolidation signals the national significance of the event and an effort to provide a unified investigative framework.

Public discussion has emerged around the scope and framing of the inquiry. Some voices have questioned whether particular communities are receiving disproportionate attention, while others have emphasised the importance of ensuring the investigation addresses all forms of hate-based violence. Islamic community leaders have called for the Commission's mandate to encompass broader patterns of racism and religiously motivated hostility, including incidents affecting Muslim Australians.

The debate has also prompted reflection on Australia's longstanding challenges related to racism and systemic inequality, particularly concerning Indigenous Australians. Historical Royal Commissions—including the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody—produced extensive recommendations, some of which remain only partially implemented. While no new inquiry has been proposed in this area, the discussion highlights continuing sensitivities around accountability, reconciliation and policy follow-through.



Photo by Getty Images

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The immediate priority remains life and property protection in fire-affected regions. Over the medium term, the scope and findings of the Federal Royal Commission may shape national debate on extremism, community relations and institutional responsibility.

CRITICAL INFRASTRUCTURE AT RISK

Ukraine's continued ability to sustain electricity supply amid ongoing conflict underscores the value of decentralised system design. The legacy structure of multiple localised power networks, rather than a single integrated national grid, has created inherent redundancy and resilience, limiting the impact of targeted attacks and sustaining essential services under extreme pressure.

In contrast, a recent power outage in Berlin exposed vulnerabilities within highly developed urban infrastructure. Sabotage disrupted electricity supply to approximately 45,000 households and 2,000 businesses, affecting hospitals, care homes and prompting the establishment of evacuation centres. The incident intensified public and political debate about the adequacy of protections for critical national infrastructure.

The Berlin outage also drew attention to recent German legislative efforts aimed at strengthening statutory obligations for critical entity resilience. While new measures were introduced only months earlier, the incident demonstrated the persistent gap between policy intent and practical protection, particularly where motivated actors seek to exploit infrastructure weaknesses.

Broader reflections suggest that intentional attacks on critical infrastructure—especially transport and power systems—remain feasible despite technological and regulatory advances. While some assets are more difficult to disrupt than others, the threshold for causing significant societal impact remains lower than commonly assumed.

Notably, institutional attitudes are beginning to shift. Governments and resilience bodies—including newly established expert panels in the United Kingdom—are addressing these risks with greater urgency and clarity. Yet perceptions persist that societies are becoming more fragile rather than more resilient, suggesting that resilience rhetoric has not yet translated into meaningful outcomes.

In conclusion, these developments underscore a growing recognition that resilience must move beyond strategy papers and into operational practice, as infrastructure security becomes a core pillar of national and regional stability.

SEVERE WINTER CONDITIONS DISRUPT INFRASTRUCTURE AND EMERGENCY SERVICES IN SERBIA

Serbia is experiencing an unusually harsh winter with heavy snowfall and prolonged freezing temperatures affecting major cities and smaller towns alike. Urban centres such as Belgrade face challenges with snow accumulation on roads, creating hazardous travel conditions and slowing emergency response efforts.

In smaller towns, widespread power outages have been reported as infrastructure struggles to cope with ice-laden conditions. Thousands of residents remain without electricity, highlighting vulnerabilities in both urban and rural systems. Logistical limitations and constrained municipal resources are slowing snow clearing operations, further exacerbating the impact of the extreme weather.

Forecasts indicate continued snow followed by icy rain and frost with temperatures expected to drop as low as -21°C in the most affected regions. Authorities maintain that the situation is under control, but the scale of disruption underscores the need for enhanced winter preparedness and infrastructure resilience in the face of rare, severe climatic events.

GOVERNANCE FATIGUE, INSTITUTIONAL DRIFT AND LEADERSHIP GAPS

FRAGMENTING WORLD: DEMOCRACY, COHESION AND POWER

The session examined converging pressures on social cohesion and the international rules-based order with particular focus on Australia and the United Kingdom. In Australia, recent events have intensified long-standing concerns around social cohesion, hate speech and multicultural tolerance, prompting renewed debate over federal-level inquiries and commissions. While current discourse has focused heavily on antisemitism, broader communities continue to highlight sustained experiences of exclusion and victimisation, raising fundamental questions about national identity, shared values and the effectiveness of existing multicultural frameworks.

The conversation identified a persistent leadership deficit in addressing these challenges, alongside public scepticism toward political institutions and governance capacity. Tensions are further compounded by inconsistencies in the application of the rule of law, particularly in Australia's international posture—where strong advocacy for legal norms abroad is at times contradicted by domestic political pressures and selective moral positioning.

At the global level, the discussion focused on rapid shifts in power. Both emerging and established actors—especially China, India, Indonesia and the wider BRICS bloc—are increasingly challenging an international order they did not help create and no longer see as fair. As economic, military and political power spreads more widely, a key challenge for the coming decades will be whether existing institutions can adapt without major disruption.

Parallel dynamics in the United Kingdom illustrate the domestic consequences of declining trust in traditional political leadership. Rising populism, amplified by social media and electoral disruption, reflects widespread dissatisfaction among middle-income populations facing sustained cost-of-living pressures, increased taxation and declining public service returns. Similar patterns are observed across multiple democracies, where perceptions of unequal burden-sharing and policy driven by short-term electoral incentives are eroding public confidence.

Collectively, the report concludes that weakening social cohesion, inconsistent governance and resistance to necessary reform within the global order are reinforcing one another. Without credible leadership and inclusive dialogue—both domestically and internationally—political volatility and institutional fragmentation are likely to intensify over the year ahead.

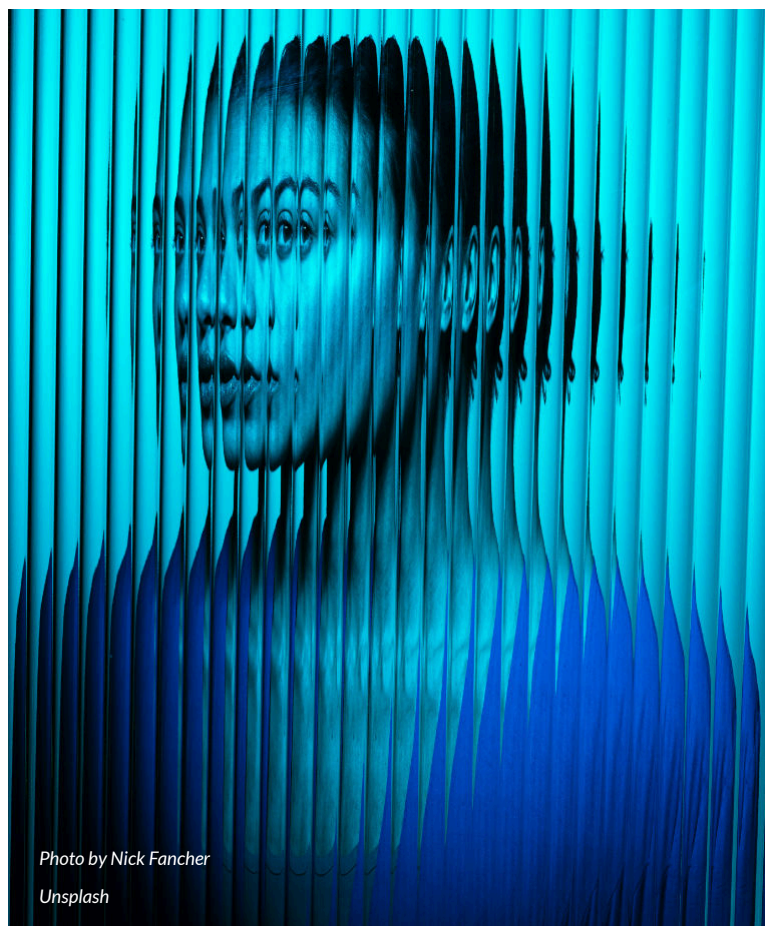


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CORPORATE ETHICS IN AN UNCERTAIN WORLD

The session explored the growing intersection between geopolitical instability, corporate ethics and commercial risk management. Evidence from recent client surveys indicates a significant shift in corporate behaviour: 71% of surveyed organisations reported a willingness to terminate long-standing tier-one contractor relationships if those partners failed to demonstrate clear moral grounding and fair business practices. Commercial loyalty is increasingly subordinate to values alignment, particularly in an environment shaped by conflict and heightened public scrutiny.

The findings align with broader risk assessments, including the 2026 International SOS forecast, which identifies a widening gap between traditional business norms and rising expectations of corporate conscience. Organisations are being forced to reconcile stated corporate and social responsibility commitments with operational decisions made under cost, regulatory and geopolitical pressure. Failure to do so is increasingly associated with legal exposure, reputational damage and financial penalties.

A case study within the session illustrated the consequences of ethical misalignment, where refusal to implement practices deemed morally and legally unsound—particularly in relation to labour fatigue, workplace safety and regulatory compliance—resulted in penalties totalling hundreds of millions of dollars for labour law violations. These penalties demonstrate the tangible cost of prioritising short-term savings over lawful and ethical conduct. These outcomes reinforce the principle that systemic ethical failures often surface through individual objections before becoming organisational crises.

Overall, the session concluded that uncertainty is now visibly translating into the commercial domain. Boards, investors and clients are placing increased emphasis on ethical resilience as a core component of enterprise risk. In parallel, broader economic pressures—such as rising costs of living and stress within essential sectors including agriculture—are intensifying scrutiny of corporate behaviour. In this environment, ethical governance is no longer a reputational accessory but a material determinant of commercial survival and long-term viability.



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LEADERSHIP GAPS IN AN AGE OF POLITICAL VOLATILITY

The near-term environment is characterised by heightened uncertainty, with electoral milestones such as upcoming mid-term elections viewed as potential inflection points but not immediate stabilisers. Until substantive political transition occurs, volatility is expected to remain a defining feature of the operating landscape.

The conversation highlighted a deeper structural concern beyond individual administrations: **the persistence and evolution of populist politics**. Attention was drawn to the likelihood that successor leadership may intensify, rather than moderate, prevailing political trends. Traditional progressive movements are assessed as struggling to respond effectively, having failed to internalise and counter populist narratives across multiple democracies. This dynamic raises long-term questions about political representation and democratic adaptability.

During the session, some challenges to the usual left-right way of thinking about politics were highlighted. Instead, the discussion focused on how inclusive and diverse leadership has proven to be effective. Looking at stable Western European countries, there appears to be a strong link between national stability and having women in top decision-making positions. Leadership that prioritises cooperation, practical solutions and results—rather than ideology or personal ambition—is seen as especially important during times of major strain.

Within the security and emergency planning domains, the report identifies a persistent gap between rhetoric and delivery. Despite widespread use of terms such as ‘resilience,’ siloed thinking, risk aversion and institutional inertia continue to limit meaningful progress. Moreover, cancel culture, reputational fear and entrenched leadership structures are contributing to reluctance in speaking candidly, challenging underperformance or holding long-standing figures to account.

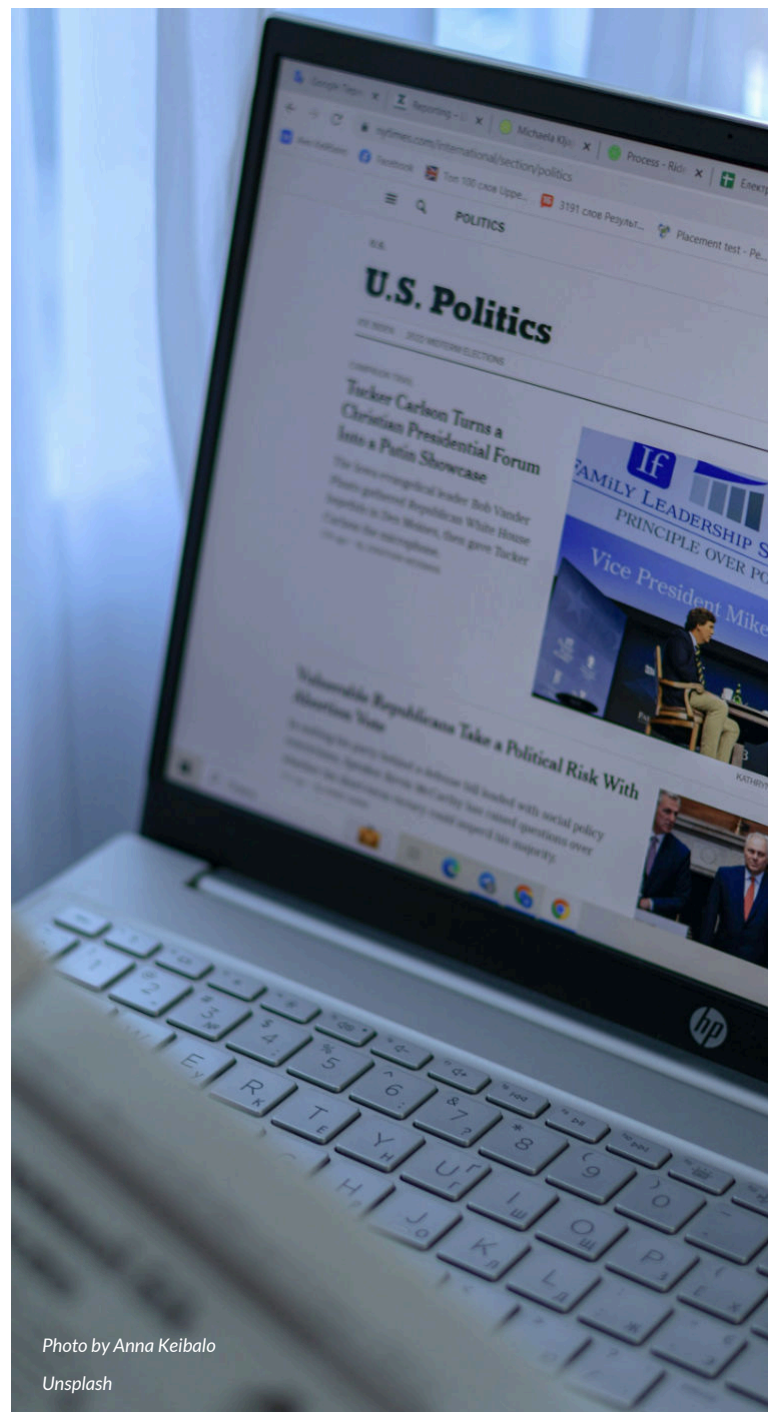


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Overall, the session ended with a call for professional bodies and institutions to move beyond comfort zones and symbolic activity. Credibility, influence and public trust will increasingly depend on the willingness to engage decisively and operate at higher strategic levels. In an environment defined by uncertainty, the capacity to act with clarity, courage and independence is identified as a defining requirement for relevance and impact in the year ahead.

POWER WITHOUT ACCOUNTABILITY

Experience suggests that when authority is consolidated, systems often undergo a gradual process of normalisation drift followed by inversion, where original intentions are reversed over time. In fact, institutions founded on principled goals can evolve into structures that prioritise self-preservation, ideology or elite interests rather than public welfare.

International and supranational bodies, including global and regional institutions, serve as examples of this pattern. While their founding objectives may be broadly supported, outcomes increasingly impose costs on those with the least capacity to absorb them. Decision-makers and senior actors retain mobility and protection, while vulnerable populations bear the social and economic consequences.

There is a strong emphasis on the primacy of basic human needs. Security, food, shelter, healthcare, education and family stability are viewed as foundational requirements that should precede aspirational or abstract policy agendas. When governance shifts focus away from these essentials toward ideological or self-actualisation goals, public trust erodes rapidly.

Frustration is also directed toward the proliferation of advisory bodies, commissions and forums that generate analysis without delivering tangible outcomes. The creation of additional consultative structures is increasingly seen as insufficient in the face of immediate and practical challenges.

The overarching message calls for a shift from rhetoric to action. Institutions tasked with preparedness and resilience are expected to demonstrate measurable, real-world impact rather than perpetuate discussion cycles. Without visible delivery, confidence in governance frameworks will continue to decline, reinforcing perceptions of drift, detachment and institutional failure.

WEAPONISING CONTEXT: POLITICS AND PUBLIC DISCOURSE

The discussion highlighted the importance of operational context in assessing the use of force and public reactions to armed enforcement environments. Experiences drawn from conflict zones such as Northern Ireland underscore how the perceived likelihood of armed confrontation fundamentally shapes behaviour, expectations and split-second decision-making. In environments where weapons are prevalent, the threshold for defensive reactions is markedly lower, influencing both enforcement posture and civilian interaction.

The broader point emphasised the risks associated with misjudging context. In highly charged or heavily armed settings, confrontational behaviour—whether symbolic or reactive—can escalate rapidly. Proliferation of weapons, regardless of jurisdiction, increases the probability that encounters will carry heightened risk, reinforcing the need for situational awareness and restraint.

The conversation also addressed growing concern over the politicisation of speech and mobility restrictions in democratic societies. Instances of commentators, academics, or public figures being denied entry or platform access for critical views were cited as part of a wider trend toward reduced tolerance for dissent. This development was characterised not as partisan, but as indicative of broader authoritarian drift across political systems.

At the same time, direct communication through social media was acknowledged as a double-edged phenomenon. While bypassing traditional media filters can enhance transparency and citizen access to primary sources, it also increases exposure to misinformation and polarised narratives. The net effect depends heavily on public capacity for critical evaluation and institutional commitment to open discourse.

SHIFTING POWER DYNAMICS AND REGIONAL REALIGNMENTS

POLARISATION AND PUBLIC FATIGUE DEEPEN POLITICAL STRAINS

Developments across the Middle East and the United States illustrate how fatigue with extremism, dissatisfaction with public policy and institutional strain are shaping political behaviour.

Across much of the Arab world, governments have demonstrated limited appetite for escalation in ongoing regional conflicts. A prevailing assessment in several capitals is that involvement with militant non-state actors would carry significant domestic and geopolitical risks. Public sentiment in many countries prioritises stability, economic security and avoidance of further destabilisation.

This restraint signals a wider strategic assessment: extended regional conflicts carry significant economic, social, and security burdens, while association with armed ideological groups provides limited practical advantage for governments focused on domestic stability and attracting international investment. Across many Arab states, priority continues to centre on preserving internal order and avoiding involvement in conflicts viewed as protracted or strategically draining.

Within the United States, debates over law enforcement policy and federal cohesion remain highly charged. Cities such as Portland have faced sustained debate over about the consequences of progressive reform agendas, particularly those involving policing and public safety. Critics argue that prolonged efforts to reduce or restructure law enforcement capacity may undermine stability, while supporters contend that reform is necessary to address systemic inequities.

More broadly, disputes over immigration policy and the concept of ‘sanctuary’ or ‘refuge’ jurisdictions raise questions about the balance between state autonomy and federal authority. Tensions of this nature test constitutional frameworks and challenge perceptions of national unity.

A recurring theme during the conversation was the perception that governance has drifted away from balance. Across ideological lines, segments of the population express dissatisfaction with economic conditions, cultural change and policy direction. Political leaders who adopt confrontational or disruptive approaches often draw support from constituencies that feel marginalised or unheard within prevailing institutional structures.

The underlying dynamic is not exclusively ideological. Rather, it reflects a broader legitimacy challenge: when significant portions of the electorate perceive governance as misaligned with lived experience, polarisation intensifies. Sustainable stability typically depends on equilibrium—between reform and order, rights and responsibilities, national cohesion and local autonomy.

Both regional and domestic political environments are entering periods of heightened political sensitivity. In the Middle East, caution and strategic restraint are likely to continue among state actors seeking to avoid escalation. In the United States, debates over federalism, law enforcement and cultural direction will remain central to political discourse.

The durability of institutions in both contexts will depend on the ability to maintain balance and respond effectively to public concerns without amplifying division.

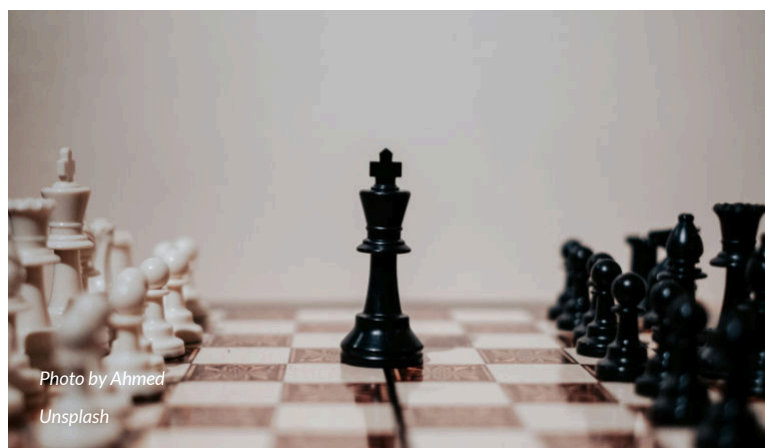


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SHIFTS IN POLITICAL POWER AND DEMOCRATIC INTEGRITY

Recent political trends have demonstrated that assumptions about generational shifts in ideology do not always predict election outcomes. Control over media and information can significantly extend the tenure of political leaders, as observed in countries with tightly managed public discourse. This dynamic highlights the influence of information environments on democratic processes and the durability of power.

The concept of voter qualifications, while occasionally proposed as a means to ensure informed decision-making, conflicts with the foundational principles of democracy, which rely on broad participation and the legitimacy of universal voting rights. Challenges to election outcomes, particularly when amplified by political rhetoric, reveal vulnerabilities in democratic systems and underscore the tension between legal frameworks and public trust.

Overall, political systems often reflect the behaviours and priorities of both leaders and the electorate. The interplay between public expectations and political conduct illustrates the complex relationship between power, accountability and the health of democratic institutions.

THE CARIBBEAN: INFLUENCE, INFRASTRUCTURE AND OPPORTUNITY

Recent observations across multiple islands, highlight increasing engagement by non-Commonwealth actors, notably China, through visible investment in health, communications, transport and security infrastructure. These developments are occurring alongside a perceptible reduction in traditional Western and Commonwealth presence, reshaping regional alignments and strategic loyalties.

Evidence suggests that several Caribbean states are actively reassessing external partnerships after experiencing uneven outcomes, perceived exploitation or inadequate long-term support from various international actors. This search for alternatives is driven not only by geopolitical considerations, but also by acute operational needs.

Emergency response capabilities—including fire services, disaster management and civil defence—are under-resourced, ageing and in some cases close to operational failure. Exposure to hurricanes, earthquakes and security risks continues to increase, while reliance on volunteer or lightly equipped forces leaves many states vulnerable to rapid escalation during crises.

The conversation identified a clear opportunity for structured, non-governmental engagement through professional institutions, technical bodies and standards-based organisations. Approaches grounded in ‘hearts and minds’ engagement—focused on capacity building, training and sustainable frameworks—are viewed as more credible and welcomed than purely political or transactional interventions. Memoranda of Understanding, professional exchanges and long-term capability development are highlighted as effective mechanisms for rebuilding trust and relevance.

These findings indicate that Caribbean governments are receptive to new partnerships that offer practical value, transparency and continuity. Strategic re-engagement through professional networks, rather than formal state diplomacy alone, presents a viable pathway to strengthen resilience and support regional stability over the next decade.

ESCALATING POWER STRUGGLES AND CRISES IN THE MIDDLE EAST AND AFRICA

Developments across the Middle East and parts of Africa reflect a growing perception of weakened international norms and an increasingly transactional geopolitical environment. Discussions in Cairo and across the region point out concerns about the erosion of established rules governing sovereignty and state conduct.

Recent global events have reinforced debate over the durability of international law and multilateral safeguards. Questions are being raised about what mechanisms effectively deter unilateral actions by major powers. Comparisons are being drawn between different conflict theatres with observers highlighting the apparent inconsistency in enforcement of sovereignty principles and accountability standards. The broader concern centres on whether the global system is shifting toward a more power-driven framework rather than rules-based governance.

A notable development involves expanding Emirati-Israeli economic and strategic engagement in parts of Africa. This outreach, viewed in some quarters as extending influence beyond the Middle East into African states, is occurring alongside ongoing regional rivalries. Saudi Arabia is perceived as counterbalancing certain initiatives, particularly in sensitive theatres such as Yemen.

Egypt faces strategic considerations in navigating relations between Gulf partners. Economic assistance, investment flows and political alignment remain central factors in Cairo's regional calculus. Current assessments suggest closer alignment with Saudi interests, reflecting shared economic priorities and financial backing, though regional dynamics remain fluid.

Military operations in Gaza continue amid mounting humanitarian distress, with conditions widely described as catastrophic. Simultaneously, the conflict in Sudan persists without resolution, contributing to displacement and economic collapse.

In southern Sudan, an unusual operational arrangement has emerged in which access to oil fields reportedly requires coordination among the Sudanese Armed Forces, the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) and South Sudanese authorities. This reflects the complex fragmentation of authority on the ground and underscores the enduring influence of non-state and rival armed actors.

Regional stability remains fragile. Power competition and unresolved conflicts are reinforcing perceptions of systemic instability. The coming months will test whether regional actors prioritise cooperative stabilization or continue operating within an increasingly competitive and fragmented geopolitical landscape in Cairo and across neighbouring states.

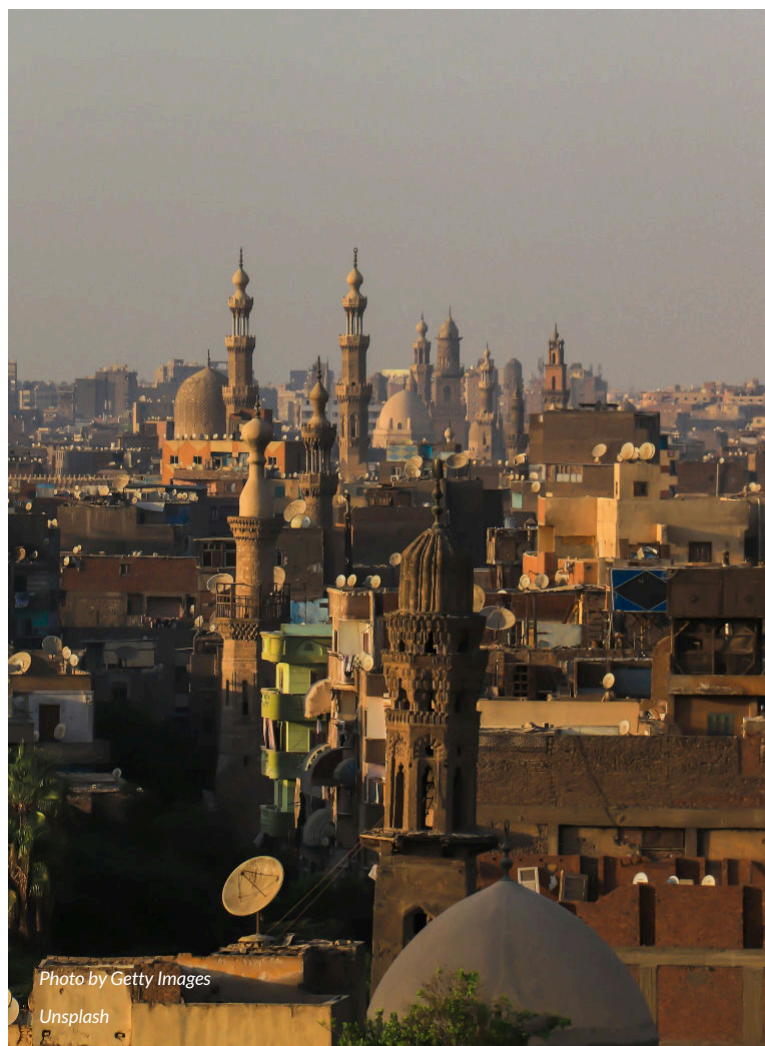


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MIDDLE EAST AND GLOBAL GEOPOLITICS

The international landscape is marked by heightened U.S. interventionism with actions including the attempted abduction of foreign leaders, strategic manoeuvres in Greenland and continued involvement in conflict zones across the Middle East. Such activities reinforce perceptions of unilateral power projection and global assertiveness.

Regional tensions remain acute, particularly in the Iranian context, where media reports suggest heightened alert levels and contingency planning among allied communities. While external actors, including Russia and China, are rumoured to influence outcomes, the situation underscores ongoing uncertainty and potential volatility in the region.

Conflict dynamics in Ukraine and Russia persist, though indications suggest potential stabilisation in certain theatres. Meanwhile, shifts in African geopolitics, particularly in Sudan, Libya and Egypt, highlight emerging realignments, with military and strategic alliances increasingly influenced by regional power calculations. Notably, Egypt's alignment with Saudi-supported forces signals a redefinition of local conflict dynamics, further complicating regional stability.

Across these regions, geopolitical manoeuvring, shifting alliances and strategic power projection reflect an international landscape increasingly defined by assertive state behaviour and the volatility of emerging conflicts. Sustained monitoring and analysis remain critical to anticipating potential escalation and assessing the wider implications for global security.

RISING GLOBAL SECURITY THREATS

The conversation highlighted the accelerating trend of authoritarian practices in the United States, raising concerns about governance, electoral relevance and the consolidation of power. Patterns observed echo earlier experiences in Eastern Europe and Russia, indicating potential long-term shifts in political behaviour and civil liberties.

The designation of Israel as a rogue state introduces critical questions regarding global security and digital infrastructure. With major social media platforms and AI data centres located within the country, vulnerabilities in digital governance, information control and AI-driven systems could significantly impact international stability over the next five years. The AI 2027 Project outlines potential high-risk scenarios where technological advances intersect with political decision-making, amplifying systemic risks.

In Africa and the Middle East, major powers such as Saudi Arabia, UAE and Israel are investing heavily in regional influence through economic and strategic projects, including agriculture, mining and energy. Emerging regional powers like Ethiopia and Egypt are increasingly asserting themselves in local conflicts, as seen in Sudan with strategic alignments shaping future recognition of territories such as Somaliland.

The combination of global authoritarian trends and shifting regional power dynamics creates a polycrisis environment, demanding careful monitoring and adaptive strategic policy frameworks to mitigate cascading geopolitical and technological risks.

RISKS AND CONSIDERATIONS IN ELECTRONIC VOTING

The adoption of electronic voting systems presents both opportunities and significant risks for democratic processes. On the one hand, digital platforms can streamline voting and increase accessibility, but on the other hand, these systems are inherently vulnerable to manipulation and cyber interference. The concentration of technological influence within a small number of actors raises concerns regarding impartiality and the potential for systemic bias in election outcomes.

Maintaining the integrity of voting systems requires rigorous oversight, transparent protocols and most importantly, ongoing assessment of cybersecurity measures. The interaction between political actors and technology providers can further complicate trust in the process, emphasising the need for independent safeguards that protect both the accuracy and the legitimacy of electoral results.

In conclusion, electronic voting underscores a critical intersection of technology, governance and democratic resilience, highlighting the importance of balancing innovation with rigorous ethical and security standards.



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COMMUNITY
RESILIENCE
AND LOCAL CAPACITY
AS CRITICAL ANCHORS

FRAGMENTED GOVERNANCE, FRAGILE RESILIENCE

The current global landscape is marked by increasing political fragmentation across multiple nations. Traditional dominant parties are losing cohesion, while smaller factions and emergent parties are gaining influence, creating a more volatile decision-making environment. This trend is observable in the UK, where both major and minor parties are navigating internal splits and reflects a broader global pattern of fractured political systems.

Performative politics is becoming a defining feature in many countries, with leaders prioritising symbolic gestures and public pressure tactics over sustained policy implementation. Such actions can create temporary effects, yet they rarely lead to long-term structural change, leaving populations exposed to uncertainty and diminishing public trust in governance structures.

The lack of clear pathways for citizens to address corruption, inadequate leadership or socio-economic marginalisation is exacerbating societal frustration. This is particularly evident among marginalised communities, who often have limited avenues to influence decisions or access justice, leaving them vulnerable to the whims of political shifts and performative agendas.

Strategic resilience requires a shift from reactionary and adversarial approaches to proactive and cohesive governance. Building collective frameworks that prioritise constructive collaboration over factional conflict is essential for creating lasting societal stability. Without this, political fracturing will continue to intensify, amplifying both domestic and international risks.

The challenge lies in identifying and promoting positive narratives and actionable policies that unite communities and strengthen institutional resilience, rather than perpetuating cycles of division, blame and performative posturing.



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YOUTH AGENCY AND THE RISKS OF GLOBAL INSTABILITY

The session highlighted growing concerns around youth political participation, information influence and rising geopolitical instability with a particular focus on the United Kingdom and Iran. The extension of voting rights to 16-year-olds in the UK general election is identified as a significant democratic shift, raising questions about political readiness, civic education, as well as geopolitical literacy among young voters.

While increased youth engagement represents democratic inclusion, the lack of structured geopolitical education, combined with legal and social restrictions that still apply at that age, creates a governance risk that requires targeted policy and educational intervention.

The discussion focused on the dominant influence of social media as a primary information source for younger generations, often outweighing expert and professional voices. This dynamic presents a strategic vulnerability in democratic systems, where misinformation, emotional narratives and algorithm-driven content increasingly shape political perceptions and voting behaviour. In summary, the session highlighted the importance of structured youth programmes, civic education initiatives and leadership engagement to build informed political awareness and critical thinking capacity.

On the international front, attention was drawn to escalating unrest in Iran, characterised by widespread protests, particularly in Tehran—an area traditionally viewed as the regime’s core stronghold. The geographic concentration and demographic composition of these protests, especially youth participation, signal a shift toward people-led mobilisation rather than border-based or peripheral unrest. Internal regime instability, fragmented leadership authority and conflicting public messaging further suggest a period of heightened political volatility.



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In conclusion, the findings point to a convergence of domestic democratic vulnerability and international instability, driven by youth influence and weakened institutional legitimacy.

The key points raised during the discussion concluded that sustained civic education and responsible leadership communication to emerging protest movements are critical to mitigating long-term political and social risk over the coming months and years.

CONCLUDING REFLECTIONS

The Global Risk Review report reinforced a central theme: **effective leadership requires action beyond inertia**. Persistent hesitation, procedural delays or the perception that inaction is safest often carry long-term costs, including unresolved risks, missed opportunities and diminished capacity to respond to emerging global challenges.

Addressing these complex issues—spanning economic, environmental and social systems—demands a shift from short-term political calculations toward long-term, sustainability-focused decision-making. Integrating environmental stewardship into core strategies is not only an ethical responsibility but also a strategic imperative for stability and resilience.

ISRM's evolving role underscores the importance of proactive leadership in risk management. Strengthened organisational structures and growing recognition of measurable impact position the Institute to influence policy and operational outcomes effectively. The ability to translate strategic insight into practical solutions remains central to building resilience in an increasingly uncertain global landscape.

Historical and contemporary examples highlighted the critical importance of strategic awareness and multi-perspective analysis. Small missteps can produce disproportionate consequences, emphasising the need for precision in both diplomatic and operational decision-making. Lessons drawn from past crises and ongoing geopolitical developments reinforce the value of preparedness, vigilance and collective knowledge-sharing.

Additionally, discussions on emerging technologies, especially on Artificial Intelligence (AI), highlighted both opportunity and responsibility. AI offers transformative potential across sectors, yet its deployment requires ethical oversight, careful governance and continuous evaluation to prevent unintended consequences. Harnessing technology effectively depends on understanding its limitations and integrating human judgment at every stage.

In conclusion, the report reaffirmed that progress in global risk management relies on informed and proactive leadership. By fostering collaboration, while embedding sustainability and resilience into strategic decision-making, organisations and individuals can navigate uncertainty and contribute meaningfully to a safer, more stable global environment.

2026

GLOBAL RISK
OUTLOOK

While 2025 was widely characterised as a year of endurance and survival, discussions highlighted a notable sense of cautious optimism regarding 2026. Contributions across regions and sectors suggested a shared perception that the coming year may represent a period of renewed momentum, strategic opportunity and potential stabilisation, despite persistent global uncertainties.

Key geopolitical developments framed the discussion, including ongoing conflicts in Ukraine and Gaza, shifting diplomatic engagements involving major global powers and contested narratives surrounding ceasefires and peace initiatives.

Particular attention was given to constraints on political decision-making, territorial disputes and the domestic and international implications of proposed settlements. Emerging dynamics in Iran, including indications of popular dissent, were also identified as an area requiring close monitoring.

In parallel, the session addressed broader structural shifts in the international system. China's increasingly explicit positioning as a global leader across economic, political and strategic domains was examined, alongside expanding multilateral initiatives, such as BRICS and other large-scale infrastructure partnerships. These developments were considered in the context of changing perceptions of global leadership, particularly among developing and southern nations.

This session reinforced the forum's core purpose: **to provide a space for informed, diverse and concise contributions that collectively enhance understanding of global risk trajectories.** As participation continues to broaden, the Global Risk Forum remains committed to maintaining an inclusive, forward-looking dialogue that captures both immediate developments and longer-term systemic trends.

GLOBAL RISK FORECAST 2026

A defining trend identified for 2026 is the acceleration of South–South cooperation, increasingly embodied through frameworks such as BRICS. This shift is expected to challenge traditional Western and U.S.- led geopolitical influence, including in regions where such leadership has historically been dominant, notably the Middle East. This rebalancing reflects broader changes in global economic, political and strategic alignment.

Contemporary conflict risk remains high. Reference was made to the International Crisis Group’s outlook for 2026, which identifies multiple high-risk contexts, including Afghanistan–Pakistan, Sudan, Iran, Israel–Gaza, Ukraine–Russia, China–Taiwan and the wider Indo-Pacific, the Sahel, Haiti, Venezuela and Myanmar. Beyond conventional conflict, emerging threats such as AI-enabled cyberattacks, sabotage of critical infrastructure—including undersea cables—and destabilising actions by state and non-state actors further complicate the global security environment.

Environmental and sustainability risks were underscored through the ongoing crisis in Indonesia, where severe flooding in Sumatra has resulted in extensive loss of life. These impacts are closely linked to deforestation and industrial land conversion, reinforcing the intersection between environmental degradation, governance and human security. At the same time, rapid advances in low-cost solar energy—driven largely by China—are transforming energy access across Asia and Africa, reshaping development pathways and geopolitical influence across the Global South.

Urbanisation emerged as a critical lens for understanding future risk. With Jakarta now identified as the world’s largest megacity, approaching 42 million people across its wider metropolitan region, the convergence of sustainability, geopolitics, energy systems, and population density is increasingly evident. Cities are positioned as the primary arenas where these risks intersect and where effective intervention can deliver the greatest impact.

Collectively, these dynamics point to 2026 as a year defined by interconnected challenges and opportunities with urban-focused, regionally grounded and sustainability-driven strategies representing the most effective pathway for risk mitigation and resilience-building in the years ahead.



Photo by Valentin Salja
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2026:

GLOBAL SECURITY AT A CROSSROADS

Many regional conflicts remain unresolved with temporary truces masking deeper, structural tensions. These conflicts carry the potential to reignite at any time, posing significant risks to regional stability and global security. Factors contributing to volatility include weakened enforcement mechanisms, lack of consistent monitoring and the erosion of agreed-upon norms in conflict resolution.

International institutions tasked with maintaining global peace—such as the United Nations, the International Criminal Court (ICC) and the International Court of Justice (ICJ)—face growing scrutiny regarding relevance and effectiveness. Current mechanisms are widely perceived as outdated, with limited ability to proactively prevent or mitigate conflicts. Challenges include diminished enforcement authority and a lack of adaptability to modern conflict dynamics.

Global security frameworks are further complicated by shifting geopolitical priorities. Reduced engagement by traditional powers in supporting multilateral institutions has created strategic gaps, while emerging powers may seek to influence or fill these spaces, potentially reshaping global norms. These developments underscore the need for international institutions to recalibrate policies and adopt innovative strategies to maintain credibility and operational relevance.

2026:

MARKETS UNDER PRESSURE IN A SHIFTING WORLD

Global economic growth is projected to remain subdued, with multiple forecasts suggesting slower expansion compared with the pre-pandemic decade. Organisations such as the United Nations and KPMG report that global GDP growth will moderate in 2026, reflecting persistent commercial tensions and uneven recovery patterns across regions.

Macroeconomic indicators point to slower but resilient activity. Broad forecasts indicate that global economic growth will hover near trend levels, while advanced economies and emerging markets face differentiated performance pressures. The pace of trade expansion is expected to remain modest, constrained by structural changes tied to geopolitical tensions and evolving supply chains.

Market dynamics are also influenced by sentiment variables. Positive sentiment, measured through investor optimism, has been shown to improve market outcomes, reinforcing confidence-driven performance in financial sectors. At the same time, commodities markets are experiencing distinct pressures; precious metals have reached elevated levels as a perceived safe haven amidst uncertainty and changes to export policies in key producer economies could influence future supply chains and industrial input costs.

Geopolitical developments are also expected to be a defining feature of 2026, anchored in a series of high-stakes electoral contests across multiple regions. Several nations are poised for pivotal elections that could recalibrate domestic governance and international alignments, with potential implications for trade, security cooperation and cross-border investment flows. Electoral outcomes in key states may influence policy trajectories and risk appetites in global capital markets.

In conclusion, these economic and political forces suggest that 2026 will be characterised by cautious optimism tempered by structural risk. Policymakers and market participants alike will need to navigate evolving trade policies, geopolitical elections and systemic fragilities within global systems, while leveraging positive sentiment where possible to support stability and growth.

CORPORATE CONSCIENCE AND ETHICAL ACCOUNTABILITY IN 2026

A recent survey of corporate clients revealed that 71% are actively seeking to exceed baseline compliance, focusing not just on adhering to regulations but on embedding higher ethical and moral standards within organisational practices. This demonstrates a growing recognition that corporate responsibility extends beyond formal obligations and is central to long-term trust and sustainability.

Organisations are demonstrating a willingness to take decisive action against contractors or service providers who fail to meet ethical or operational standards. Contractual and moral accountability are increasingly linked, reflecting a zero-tolerance approach to behaviours or practices that fall short of organisational expectations. Early examples include Tier 1 contractors in the Middle East embracing accountability measures in engagements with local clients, even in contexts where such concepts are not traditionally embedded.

The trend toward enhanced corporate conscience has implications for risk management, supplier selection and stakeholder engagement. Companies that embed ethical accountability at the core of decision-making are likely to strengthen reputational resilience and foster stronger, trust-based relationships with partners, clients and communities.



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GLOBAL FOOD SECURITY AT A TIPPING POINT

Agricultural production across multiple regions is described as entering a phase of contraction with widespread land abandonment as farming operations become economically unsustainable.

At the core of this crisis is a profound market distortion. Farm-gate prices for staple crops, including wheat, are reported to be at historically low levels relative to production costs. This imbalance has eroded profitability to the point where continued food cultivation is no longer viable for many producers. As a result, farmer protests are emerging across every continent, reflecting a shared experience of financial pressure regardless of national context. Notably, these protests often target food imports, even though exporting regions are experiencing the same price suppression and economic stress.

In response to market conditions, agricultural land is increasingly being diverted away from food production toward alternative uses such as bioenergy crops. While economically rational under current pricing structures, this shift raises serious ethical and strategic concerns, as arable land capable of producing food is instead allocated to non-food outputs. This trend further tightens food availability and amplifies long-term risk to food security.

The crisis is compounded by multiple reinforcing pressures, including climate change, soil degradation from overcropping, heavy reliance on chemical inputs, as well as the growing number of intermediaries between producers and consumers. These factors collectively disconnect the value of food at the point of consumption from the true cost of production, transferring risk disproportionately onto primary producers.

Taken together, these dynamics suggest that global food security is approaching a critical inflection point. Without structural reform of agricultural markets, supply chains and pricing mechanisms, continued contraction in food production may accelerate with far-reaching consequences for social stability and human security worldwide.

2026 INSIGHTS:

**RESILIENCE, INFLUENCE
AND INFRASTRUCTURE AT RISK**

Community resilience emerged as a decisive factor in disaster response and recovery. In the Caribbean, recovery capability and external engagement varied significantly by jurisdiction. Observations pointed to a growing influence of China across several islands, expressed through visible 'hearts and minds' initiatives such as medical diplomacy and infrastructure presence. These actions are shaping local perceptions and strategic alignment in ways that extend beyond immediate disaster resilience. At the same time, examples such as Jamaica demonstrated a strong preference for national self-reliance, including the decision to decline external assistance while relying on voluntary and former emergency service networks to support recovery efforts.

In parallel, the United Kingdom reinforced the value of community-based adaptation. During recent wildfires in Yorkshire and Scotland, local farmers played a critical operational role by integrating agricultural equipment and local knowledge into firefighting efforts alongside retained fire services. This collaboration highlighted the practical value of Community Asset Registers, enabling rapid mobilisation of local capabilities and strengthening response capacity in hard-to-reach environments such as moorland terrain.

A third and increasingly critical theme concerns infrastructure vulnerability, particularly dependence on uninterrupted electricity supply. Persistent but under-acknowledged risks related to power disruption and grid capacity constraints were noted as significant gaps in emergency planning. These risks are intensifying amid expanding demand from mega data centres and digital infrastructure, raising unresolved questions about long-term power and water availability. Current planning and policy discussions were characterised as insufficiently aligned with operational realities, resulting in inefficiencies and systemic exposure.

Overall, these observations point to a widening gap between strategic ambition and practical resilience. By strengthening community-level capability and addressing critical infrastructure fragility through realistic, then integrated planning will be essential to improving preparedness and response capacity in the years ahead.



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FROM RISK TO RESILIENCE: **SHIFTING THE GLOBAL AGENDA FROM DIAGNOSIS TO DELIVERY**

While problem identification and risk diagnosis are well established, disproportionate attention continues to be placed on describing challenges rather than implementing solutions. Entering 2026, a stronger focus on translating knowledge into action is presented as both necessary and achievable.

Central to this approach is the transition from risk to resilience—moving from analysis to opportunity and from lessons observed to lessons applied. Recurrent crises, including recent high-profile fire incidents, continue to demonstrate that institutional learning exists but is repeatedly obstructed by persistent implementation barriers. Decades of international research have identified a consistent set of universal roadblocks that prevent effective adoption of lessons learned, resulting in repeated failure patterns across sectors and regions.

The discussion also reinforced a shared commitment to shifting from outputs to outcomes. Sustainable progress is framed as fundamentally local—rooted in communities, cities and practical interventions that improve access to resources, livelihoods together with economic participation. Broader policy frameworks are most effective when they support, rather than substitute for, action at the community level.

Altogether, these insights position 2026 as a pivotal year for applied resilience. By prioritising solution-driven engagement and implementation-focused collaboration, global risk forums and resilience networks can move beyond commentary toward measurable change.

FIRE, FRAGILITY AND POLITICAL CHANGE IN 2026

Recent incidents, including fatal fires in Switzerland and increasing fire-related building losses in Nepal, underscore a systemic weakness in current infrastructure resilience approaches. While significant progress has been made globally in designing structures resilient to earthquakes, floods and wind-related hazards, fire resilience remains comparatively neglected. Fire is frequently treated as a secondary or isolated risk rather than as a core design and governance challenge.

Evidence indicates that a growing number of buildings and urban areas are exposed to fire-related events each year. Many of these incidents are not the result of natural hazards but are man-made disasters linked to inadequate materials, insufficient design standards, poor enforcement or lack of appropriate technology adoption. Fire damage assessment methodologies and fire-resilient technologies are not yet comprehensively embedded within building codes and regulatory frameworks, including in Nepal, across parts of the Asia-Pacific region and even in highly developed regulatory environments such as the United States.

Beyond structural damage, fire incidents present serious short-term and long-term public health risks. Exposure to smoke, toxic chemicals and combustion by-products released from modern construction materials has direct and secondary health impacts on affected populations. These health consequences often extend well beyond the immediate incident, placing additional strain on healthcare systems and communities. Current resilience planning insufficiently accounts for these cascading health effects, further reinforcing the need for integrated fire-risk governance.



Looking toward 2026, Nepal enters a period of cautious optimism alongside significant political and security challenges. The interim government has committed to holding elections within the constitutionally defined timeline, generating hope for political renewal. However, the electoral environment is complex, with over 140 registered political parties and more than 30 new parties emerging following recent youth-led movements. Ensuring electoral security and effective governance under these conditions presents a substantial challenge.

At the same time, a notable shift is occurring within the political landscape. New political actors with strong educational and professional backgrounds—including engineers, medical professionals, legal experts and social scientists—are entering public life. This trend reflects broader societal demand for competence-driven governance and evidence-based decision-making, potentially reshaping Nepal's political future.

U.S. POLITICS 2026: **POWER, PRESSURE AND UNCERTAINTY**

The outlook for 2026 highlights critical developments within US political leadership, with potential implications for party dynamics, electoral strategy and broader governance stability. Close observation of party behaviour and voter sentiment will be essential for anticipating shifts in power and policy direction.

Ongoing discussions focus on the conditions under which the Republican Party may shift away from support for Trump. Current assessments indicate that while early signs of dissent are emerging, core support remains solid. Historical patterns suggest that party realignment often occurs when leadership is perceived as unlikely to secure electoral victories, at which point political actors may quickly reposition themselves to maintain influence and cohesion.

The 2026 midterms are expected to be a pivotal moment, potentially constraining the executive agenda and reshaping legislative priorities. Strategic responses by political stakeholders will likely reflect both pragmatic considerations and public perception management, as party members seek to maintain credibility and avoid association with potentially losing leadership.

While short-term turbulence may arise around party leadership and electoral outcomes, the long-term expectation is for organisational normalisation. Political actors are likely to revert to standard operational procedures after transitional phases, emphasising continuity and the projection of stability.

2026 is poised to be a year of strategic recalibration within US political parties, where leadership perceptions, electoral forecasts and party loyalty converge to influence governance outcomes. Monitoring these dynamics will provide valuable insight into policy direction, institutional resilience and the broader geopolitical impact of US domestic politics.

WESTERN BALKANS 2026: **POLITICAL STRAINS AND SECURITY SHIFTS**

Following months of political uncertainty, snap elections in Kosovo produced a decisive outcome, enabling the resumption of previously frozen EU funding. This renewed financial support is expected to relieve immediate economic pressures and bolster ongoing development initiatives, though core regional disputes, particularly with Serbia, remain unresolved.

Defence cooperation among Croatia, Albania and Kosovo is strengthening, prompting close observation from Serbia. These developments have influenced Belgrade's foreign policy, leading to deeper engagement with Hungary. Hungary's dual role—as an EU member and a regional power broker—continues to shape security, migration and diplomatic dynamics, highlighting the complex balance between national and supranational interests in the region.

Migration pressures persist along key borders, maintaining regional security and humanitarian implications. Additionally, domestic civic engagement is increasing, exemplified by grassroots initiatives such as nationwide student-led campaigns advocating for early parliamentary elections. These movements reflect growing political activism and potential shifts in public sentiment, which may influence broader governance trends in 2026.



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NIGERIA 2026: RISING POLITICAL AND SECURITY RISKS

Effective risk management in Nigeria is currently constrained by inconsistent political will. Governance structures are challenged in addressing internal security threats, resulting in operational uncertainty for both domestic and international actors. The alignment between political priorities and security needs remains tenuous, limiting the capacity to implement coordinated risk mitigation measures.

Nigeria continues to face complex security dynamics, including insurgency and localised sedition. Recent military actions, including interventions in the northwest, underscore the sensitivity of operations in contested areas. Mischaracterisation of security initiatives as sectarian or factional risks exacerbating tensions and can undermine both local and international confidence in stabilisation efforts.

Managing risk in Nigeria requires a nuanced understanding of the interplay between governance, political intent, and societal pressures. Approaches must prioritize de-escalation, avoid inflaming sectarian divisions, and maintain operational flexibility in response to rapidly changing conditions. Coordination with local authorities and international partners is critical to ensuring effective intervention while safeguarding civilian populations.



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ISRM GROWTH AND GLOBAL ENGAGEMENT FOR 2026

The Institute of Strategic Risk Management (ISRM) is entering 2026 with significant momentum, reflecting expansion across chapters, activities, governance and strategic partnerships. This year marks a milestone in organisational development, underpinned by a renewed commitment to global engagement and thought leadership in risk management.

ISRM chapters are growing in membership and regional influence, with new initiatives designed to strengthen both local and international presence. Activities span educational programs, resilience projects and knowledge-sharing platforms, reflecting a diversified approach to risk awareness and management.

A series of international conferences is planned in strategic locations across the globe. These events are designed to foster collaboration, knowledge exchange and innovation in various sectors, enhancing ISRM's role as a leading authority in risk and resilience.

Ongoing improvements in governance structures are supporting scalable growth, enabling efficient decision-making and stronger alignment with organisational objectives. Partnerships with industry, academic and governmental stakeholders are expanding ISRM's influence and reinforcing its capacity to address emerging global risks.



THE INSTITUTE OF STRATEGIC
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