

Thoughts on Coming Apart and the Coming Great Reset



**Turning and turning in the widening gyre
The falcon cannot hear the falconer**

Kit Webster

Themes and Theses

Why I'm Contemplating Out Loud

(Initially formulated in the early 90s, following decades of reading history, philosophy, religion, psychology and a lot of contemplation, particularly on the subject of cycles. In the end, this is a relatively straightforward story about human nature and of history rhyming.)

The US will enter a period of crisis in the early 2000s. In the late 90s, I incorporated Strauss' and Howe's terminology of the Fourth Turning (without incorporating their generations paradigm) and agreed with Howe that the end stage of the crisis began with the Great Financial Crisis and would last into the early 2030s. We are now at the beginning of the end stage of the crisis.

The crisis will be serious and could be existential.

Internal strife will increase, up to and including secession and civil war. International conflicts will increase as the vacuum created by the weakening of the US is filled by other players.

There will be many threads to the crisis, but the primary thread will be debt, deficits and entitlements. Other factors include, eg, demographics, a loss of meaning and myth and a loss of self-discipline.

Politics will move leftward as citizens look for some refuge from the chaos. The US will become increasingly susceptible to a (man) on a white horse, who can come from either the left or the right.

Inflation, as the most likely way to address debt since austerity is not politically acceptable, will significantly lower standards of living, exacerbating the civil crises.

Eventually, the dollar will be inflated away and lose its reserve status. Once the old rot is cleared out, and assuming continuity, there will be the basis for the establishment of a new order.

There will be what Strauss and Howe calls a First Turning . It will be constructed out of the physical infrastructure, wealth, energy sources, thoughts and values in the culture at the time. At this point in time, those components are unknowable. We can anticipate that the next

future will be increasingly chaotic. We can anticipate that there will be destruction, and then reconstruction from some level. We cannot yet anticipate the form of the reconstruction or the level from which it will begin.

(Added in the early 00s) While humans are contributing to global warming, policies implemented to address manmade global warming will create a significant energy crisis, probably toward the end of the Fourth Turning.

(Added around 2020) The loss of faith by our youth in our founding principles means that the new order will at least partially be based on new principles. As yet, I have no visibility as to what those principles might be.

(Added in 2023) The lowering / elimination of standards in education, the judiciary, law enforcement, the military and other segments of our society will create a population unable to adequately comprehend, do or respond to the challenges of democracy and culture.

(Added in 2025) China has won - at least for the next 5-10 years. The US is dependent on China for the materials it uses to create defense items. We literally cannot fight China without China's help. China's industrial base is impressive; the US has to rebuild. China is out-innovating the US. China is turning out more engineers and scientists than the US by far. This does not mean that China does not face challenges - demographics perhaps being its primary challenge. The US military remains stronger than China's, but in an age of drone warfare, that statement means less than it has historically. The US still has bargaining chips and will need to use them to maintain any kind of status quo.

(Added in 2025) AI has the potential to profoundly affect human culture. However, AI faces several significant hurdles, including the demand for massive amounts of electricity, which may not be available, and a cultural revolt against its existence. Since it could be existential, and since China is pursuing it, the US has no alternative, at least in the short term.

Time, Time, Time, See What's Become Of Me

January 2, 2026

Quotes to Contemplate

I need someone to protect me from all the measures they take in order to protect me. - Banksy

It is usually futile to try to talk facts and analysis to people who are enjoying a sense of moral superiority in their ignorance. - Thomas Sowell

I want to live between two day care centers in Minneapolis because I hate being around kids. - from X

The real problem of humanity is the following: We have Paleolithic emotions, medieval institutions, and godlike technology. - E.O. Wilson

Men in their migrations carry along their gods. - Will Durant

I don't need a New Year's resolution. It's the year's turn to be better. - from X

We will replace the frigidity of rugged individualism with the warmth of collectivism. - Mamdani (it's become an instant meme)

We should not go overboard with social transfers. For we must avoid letting people get lazy from their sense of entitlement to welfare. – Xi

Summary of Primary Thoughts To Contemplate In This Issue

How someone fills time becomes who they are.

My predictions and worldview survived another year.

This Minnesota-Somali thing could be big. It also could be, like Epstein, too big to prosecute.

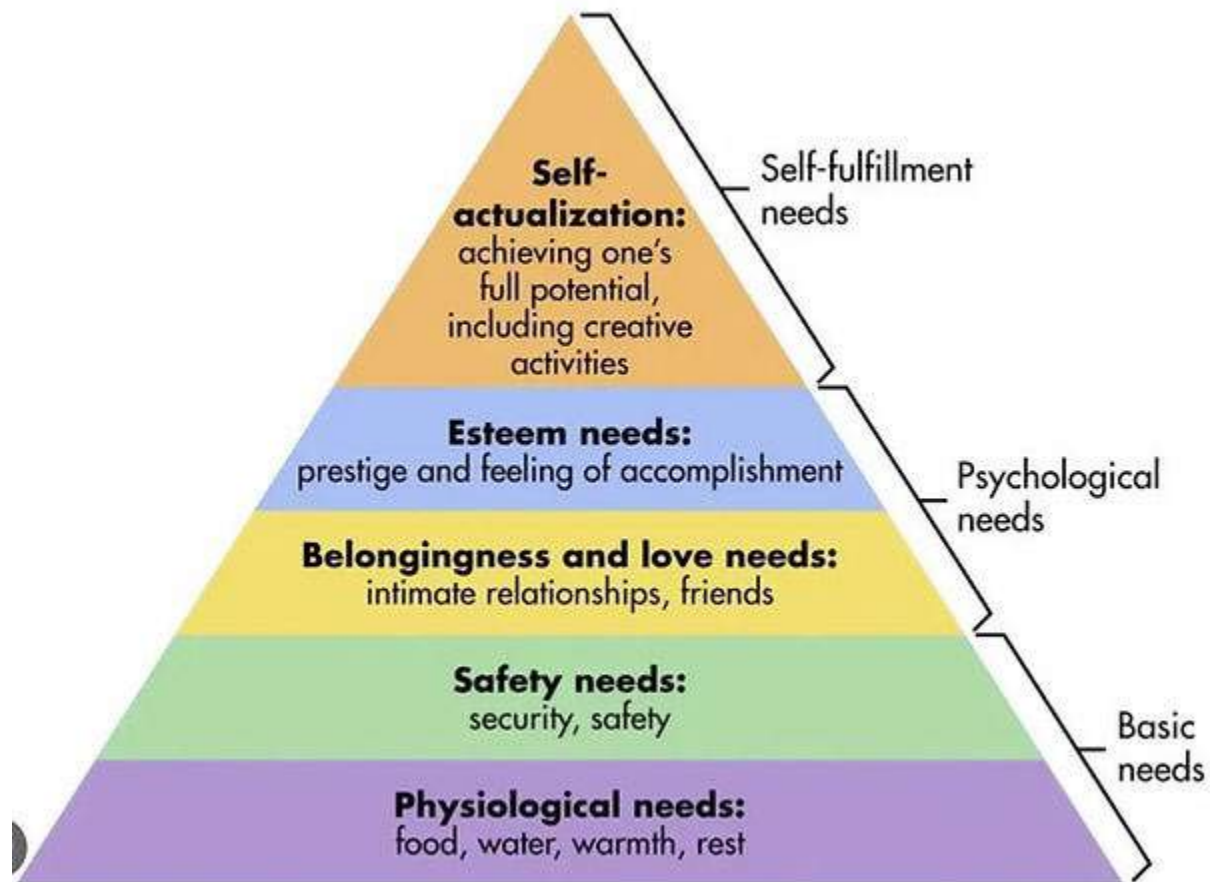
Time, Time, Time, See What's Become of Me

"All human misery derives from the inability to sit quietly in a room alone." - Pascal

This week we contemplate something I believe profoundly affects our culture and politics - the use of spare time.

When I was contemplating human nature, trying to put together a view of the way things work, I needed to explain the variations and weirdnesses of human behavior. Several of my "laws" helped - half the population has an IQ of 100 or less; the endless combinations of genes and environments in which people are raised create infinite variety in thoughts, abilities and values; humans are primarily emotional and not rational animals; the need to avoid and deny the reality of meaninglessness and death; the road to hell is paved with good intentions. I summed this all up with the conclusions that "sex, drugs and rock and roll win every time" and that "people are crazy." Something else was needed, and I realized it was to understand the use of spare time in the milieu of a wealthy society.

I started with Maslow and his hierarchy of needs.



You know how it goes. As an oversimplification, if you do not have your physiological needs fulfilled, you will focus on fulfilling them. Once they are fulfilled or assured, you make sure you are safe. Then you focus on belonging, then on esteem, then on self-actualization.

I think self-actualization is doing things you want to do with your spare time.

For millennia, self-actualization was available for the few. Essentially everyone lived on farms, working all day. Inside, you were stuck with a large family in one or two rooms. Light was precious, so nights were dark. You were a long way away from anybody and further away from town. You could walk, or ride a horse, or drive a cart.

In town, where relatively few people lived, there were stores and saloons and brothels. You could go to a few places and you could socialize.

Light was still precious and scarce.

Perhaps the technologies that had the greatest effects on human behavior were the automobile and sources of increasingly-cheap light - whale oil, natural gas, electricity. With the car, you could go to town. More importantly, there was a place to have sex when no one was looking - which is shorthand for being able to get away from the watchful eye of everyone else. Light made nights available for self-actualization.

There is a great deal of discussion today about the time of limitless energy or the arrival of AI when we will have a golden age for creativity and pursuing our passions - you know, art, poetry, reading.

We pretty well have that now. Lots of spare time. So, we can learn about what humans do when they can self-actualize.

While some write plays and attend the opera, it seems that our passions are focused on screen time, including social media and video games ... and porn ... and gambling.

But, we knew that. We knew that very few actually have passions for art and literature.

It seems that we have time to disagree and to be outraged. It seems that we have time to riot and burn things down. We spend a lot on stuff and on entertainment.

But it goes deeper than that.

(The following is a collaboration between Claude and me.)

Empty time forces confrontation with mortality, meaninglessness, the self. Most people will do almost anything to avoid this, which explains everything from doomscrolling to workaholism among the financially secure.

Once survival needs are met, how someone fills time becomes who they are.

The people who structure these time-fillers wield enormous cultural power. The shift from bowling leagues to algorithmic feeds isn't just technological; it's a transfer of meaning-making from local institutions to platform companies.

Conspicuous leisure has become conspicuous productivity—the executive who runs ultramarathons, the professional who "optimizes"

their morning routine. Even leisure must now be performed as achievement.

Some time-filling builds capacity, connection, meaning. Some depletes it. A society where discretionary time flows predominantly into passive consumption versus active creation versus civic engagement versus skill development will produce very different political and cultural outcomes. The aggregate of millions of individual time-allocation decisions shapes elections, social cohesion, innovation rates, mental health epidemics.

The competition for human attention is really a competition to solve people's terror of unoccupied consciousness. Whoever wins that competition—whether it's TikTok, churches, political movements, or local community organizations—shapes the culture. The question isn't whether people will fill their time (they will, compulsively) but with what, and who decides.

The shift from time-filling that produced something—skills, relationships, civic capacity, physical objects, local knowledge—to time-filling that consumes something produced elsewhere for profit. The bowling league member developed social capital and weak ties that Putnam showed predicted civic health. The Instagram scroller develops... a tolerance for more scrolling.

First-order cultural implications:

Atrophied agency. When most discretionary hours flow into consumption rather than creation, people lose the feeling that they can make things happen in the world. Learned helplessness at civilizational scale. The person who builds a deck, organizes a neighborhood watch, or runs a local theater company carries a fundamentally different psychological posture toward problems than someone whose primary activity is watching others do things. Multiply this across a population and you get a culture that expects solutions to come from elsewhere—platforms, government, celebrities, algorithms.

Preference for spectacle over process. Passive consumption optimizes for emotional peaks—outrage, inspiration, drama. Constructive activity is mostly boring, punctuated by occasional satisfaction. A population

trained on the former loses tolerance for the latter. This bleeds everywhere: politics becomes entertainment, work must be "passionate," relationships should feel like movies. The long, undramatic work of building anything—institutions, expertise, marriages, communities—becomes emotionally intolerable.

Fragmented common ground. Constructive time-filling historically happened in places—the workshop, the church basement, the field, the town hall. Consumption happens in algorithmically personalized silos. You lose shared reference points. Neighbors become strangers who happen to sleep near each other. The "imagined community" of nationhood requires some baseline of shared experience, and that's evaporating into a million niche feeds.

Political implications:

Demand without capacity. People still want things—safety, prosperity, meaning, fairness. But the skills required to produce those outcomes collectively—organizing, compromising, sustained effort, tolerance for incremental progress—have atrophied. You get a politics of complaint rather than construction. Everyone knows what's wrong; almost no one can articulate a buildable alternative, much less show up week after week to build it.

Susceptibility to performative politics. If citizens primarily experience agency through consumption choices (which brand, which content, which identity), political engagement becomes another consumption choice. Voting for who feels right. Posting the right takes. Buying the right merchandise. The performance of political identity substitutes for the exercise of political power. This serves both demagogues and the status quo—lots of noise, little actual challenge to existing arrangements.

Volatility without direction. Passive populations can still be mobilized emotionally—they can be made angry, scared, enthusiastic. But without constructive habits, that energy dissipates or destructs rather than builds. Flash mobs of outrage that burn out or burn things down, followed by exhaustion and retreat to the feed. Revolutions require

constructive capacity to produce anything other than chaos; so does democracy, frankly.

The harder question: Is this reversible? Or is non-constructive time-filling simply what humans do once survival pressure lifts and attention-capture technology reaches a certain sophistication?

There's a case that it is reversible—that the current arrangement is an artifact of a particular technological moment (algorithmic feeds optimized for engagement) meeting a particular institutional collapse (decline of churches, unions, civic organizations). Different incentives, different infrastructure, different norms could shift the equilibrium.

But there's also a darker case: that constructive time-filling was always a minority phenomenon, enabled by necessity or elite cultivation, and that given truly free choice plus frictionless passive entertainment, most humans will choose the later. In which case the political implication is a permanent drift toward bread-and-circuses managed democracy, punctuated by occasional spasms of unfocused discontent.

A Brief Look Back, And Forward

The end of a year; the beginning of a new year - a time to reflect on the past and anticipate the future.

I have killed a lot of electrons in the past year on numerous subjects.

How well did my original theses play out?

2025 was a year of continuation of my theses, without exception. I added two additional theses to my list, having to do with AI and with China. We are now over 30 years in, and so far, so ... good?

I see nothing in 2026 that will change the trajectories in place. I would guess that the 2028 elections will be pivotal, but am not formally predicting that, yet, and I continue to see the end of the Fourth Turning in the early 2030s.

So, anticipate greater instability and conflict, and further erosion of institutions.

I wish I had some good news, but there we are.

Islam

My article last week on Islam did not stir up nearly as much controversy as I thought it would.

However, reader LH called me out on no-go zones. I delve into that topic in greater detail and nuance in an article at the bottom of this post.

Bottom line - he was right to call me out.

The Effects of Tariffs, So Far

As usual, when Trump did his tariff thing, there was a lot of uninformed opinionating by both sides. I said that the initial 100% tariffs would literally break the world, and Trump had to back off. I noted that the effect would be mixed - some of each party, the manufacturer, the importer and the consumer, would bear part of the burden, with the consumer bearing most of it.

What actually happened?

Well, Trump used tariffs as a negotiating tool to beat concessions, primarily investments in the US, out of trading partners. On its own terms, that went well, but we shall see how much was lip service and how much was real.

A lot of countries, particularly Canada, were irritated.

Trump had to change, back off and renegotiate. In particular, he had to reduce tariffs, generally, and particularly on China, reduce tariffs for certain foodstuffs and pay money directly to farmers who were damaged by tariffs.

A lot of moving parts.

While I think tariffs can be a valid policy option, Trump has implemented them with his usual bull-in-a-china-shop subtlety.

We're at year end. What does the data say about who paid the tariffs?

Estimates vary, but so far, approximately \$200 billion in Trump tariffs have been collected. (In terms of reducing the deficit, tariffs bring in less

money than the One Big Beautiful Bill costs. Tariff revenue per person in 2025 was approximately \$570.)

While it is pretty well agreed that Trump's first round of tariffs in 2018-2019, and continued by Biden, were borne by consumers, the 2025 round of tariffs is more complicated.

It seems that foreign manufacturers are bearing little of the cost.

Importers seem to be bearing 80% of the cost. The theory is that they are holding their breaths, hoping for a reversal of the tariffs, including a favorable ruling by the Supreme Court.

Consumers are bearing the rest.

It is anticipated that Importers can hold on only so long and that 2026 will be the year when the costs of tariffs will be passed to consumers. We shall see.

Markets

Updated charts

> Over the next four years, \$28 trillion of the \$36 trillion National Debt matures. Financing current deficits will add another \$10 trillion. There is no way the U.S. can sell \$38 trillion of Treasuries with a 4% handle. So either we pay 6% or more, or the Fed has to buy it all. ~ Peter Schiff

> Uh-oh - Not a single investment bank expects the S&P 500 to be lower at the end of 2026.

> 2026 will be the year when my dollar thesis works out or not. A crash in the dollar will signal the beginning of the end game for (my version of) the Fourth Turning.

> Luke Gromen and Lyn Alden are my go-to gurus when I need a deep understanding of what is going on in macro. Next comes Jim Bianco. He had this to say in a recent Thoughtful Money podcast:

"I am a big bear on China. I think that their debt problems, their housing markets, their economy is in a very, very precarious place right now. Uh, and that's who needs to be monetarily repriced. That's not going to get fixed anytime soon. And if it's not going to get fixed anytime soon, then the buyers of gold, remember gold and silver are like 3% the size of the stock and bond markets, they're very, very small. If you just told me China is in trouble and the Chinese are buying silver and gold, fine, the rest of the world, do whatever, you know, carry on whatever you want to do. Gold and silver are going to keep roaring higher. Um, I don't need to spin stories about massive inflation or problems in the US or, you know, unrest in Europe or anything. I don't need any of that. I've got enough with China and with Asia. And that's why I think it is at a sustainably higher level."



So, You Say You Want A Revolution?

> First I've heard of it - from the Guardian - "The Working Families party describes itself as "a multiracial party that fights for workers over bosses and people over the powerful" that seeks to build "an America which realizes the promise – unrealized in our history – of freedom and equality for all". In practice, candidates the party supports often run in Democratic primaries as insurgents aligned with its goals of affordability, improved conditions for workers, a stronger social safety net and reforms to the democratic process.

Candidates can be endorsed by both Working Families and the Democratic party. "We cook what we have in the kitchen," Mitchell said. Part of Working Families' success stems from the Democratic party's flagging brand with some voters, who see it as too moderate or simply unwilling to fight for the interests of its voters. As the Democrats spent the last year soul-searching over how to improve their standing with voters, Working Families peeled off some of those who previously called themselves Democrats."

> Trump droned a dock on land in Venezuela.

> Unreleased Epstein pages are now over 5 million.

> Trump said that he would abandon for now his efforts to deploy the National Guard in Chicago, Portland and Los Angeles. His decision comes after the Supreme Court said last week that he could not deploy troops in the Chicago area over the objection of Illinois officials. The Guard is still deployed in Washington, New Orleans and Memphis.

> I don't know how to tell you this, but another potential government shutdown is coming at the end of the month.

So, Were There Aliens in That Comet, or Not?

Short Takes

> There is a possibility this all works out fine - Zohran Mamdani Appoints Lillian Bonsignore as New FDNY Commissioner. "Although she never served as a firefighter, she's confident that won't matter ... " All the press releases note that she is big in the LGBTQ community, which is fine, but there is the whiff of DEI in the air.

> Can't wait to see how the Somali-fraud thing works out in Minnesota (and elsewhere).

This is potentially so big, encompassing big names, race, immigration, that it has the chance to be another Epstein - too big to prosecute. This was true prior to Trump, but Trump's very low bar for ethics complicates things considerably.

And Patel is a joke.

Other than that, we're good.

For better and for worse, we are now going to see an outbreak in "citizen journalism." I think mostly for good, because there is a lot of rot that is being overlooked by the establishment.

Comments from X that preliminarily sound right -

"Everyone around that situation knew it was fraud. Now we have Nick Shirley go out, record it and drop receipts... Suddenly, Patel is jumping into action. It sounds great, but it's not. It's much bigger than Minnesota"

"Until someone goes to jail and is held accountable for allowing fraud to happen it's not going to stop."

And, there it is - headline - "Washington State AG Warns Citizen Journalists To Stop Investigating Somali Daycares Or Face Potential Hate Crime Charges."

Maybe a topic for an article, but there is a point at which underlying faith in the system breaks and the common (man) decides that the only way to survive is to game the system. This attitude is prevalent in third world countries and countries like India, Brazil and Mexico. My feeling is that we are at that point. The blatant corruption of Biden and even worse corruption of Trump, with everybody doing bad things and getting pardons. BLM rioting and looting and scamming with no consequences. Epstein. Minnesota, subsidies to the rich. We are saturated in corruption and system-gaming. At some point, the structure breaks. I think the murder of the insurance executive in plain sight that led to the killer's getting thousands of supporters is the perfect metaphor. Right and wrong do not matter. It is the failings of the system that matter. And, I don't see anyone saying that we can do better.

> Intriguing idea, but needs more data - Compared to 1960 the murder rate is 4-5 times higher than it seems because of improved hospital care.

> San Francisco Mayor signs bill to give Black residents \$5 million each in reparations — but allocates \$0 to the initiative. - presumably that comes later.

> As Muslim migration to Texas has increased, a similar uproar has risen over a proposed Muslim-focused neighborhood anchored by a mosque in rural Texas, some 40 miles from Dallas.

Promotional materials first described EPIC City, named after the East Plano Islamic Center, as the “epicenter of Islam in America.”

Following backlash at the local, state, and federal levels, it changed its name to The Meadow.

The development would encompass 402 acres of farmland outside Josephine, a town of 8,800 residents founded in 1888 by a railroad company back when cotton was king in Texas.

It would include 1,000 homes, a mosque, a K-12 faith-based school, sports facilities, a community college, senior housing, an outreach center, and businesses.

> Peruvian shamans do a New Year ritual and make predictions, they say Trump will fall ill, Maduro will be defeated and the Russia-Ukraine war will end.

> Recent scientific study. - Prejudice based on political affiliation is now stronger than prejudice based on race, religion, language, or regional origin. Curiously, whereas education is associated with decreased racial prejudice, it's associated with increased political prejudice.

> You know there is no such thing as a free lunch, right? You know that you are paying for all the airline miles and credit card rewards and credit card cash-backs, right? Maybe not you, directly, but someone. In a perfect world, if all rewards were eliminated tomorrow, air fares would go down, credit card transaction fees would go down and credit card interest rates would go down. Since we don't live in a perfect world, it is not clear in what direction all of these things would go. Stop and think for a second. Credit card interest rates average 20-24% when the Prime Rate is 6.75%. Since transaction fees support the infrastructure, the interest rate supports profits, credit losses and perks.

> A brief sighting of sanity - Police chiefs in the UK will reportedly seek to scrap non-crime hate incidents in plans they will present to the Home Secretary next month. The Telegraph reports that police leaders have decided that NCHIs are no longer "fit for purpose" after warnings that recording them undermines freedom of speech and diverts officers away from fighting crime. Under the plans, NCHIs will be replaced with a new

“common sense” system, where only a fraction of such incidents will be recorded under the most serious category of anti-social behaviour.

> A federal district judge temporarily blocked Texas from enforcing a state law that requires app stores to implement age-verification measures, ruling that the statute likely violates the First Amendment.

> A guy did a [study](#) of favorite foods by race/ethnic group. Tradition and stereotypes flourished, with Asians liking stir-fry and Hispanics liking TexMex. I kid you not, blacks came in with fried chicken. Whites, however, had wine as their top identifier, with liquor and beer both near the top. Whites' top actual foods were cottage cheese and yogurt. I identify as black.

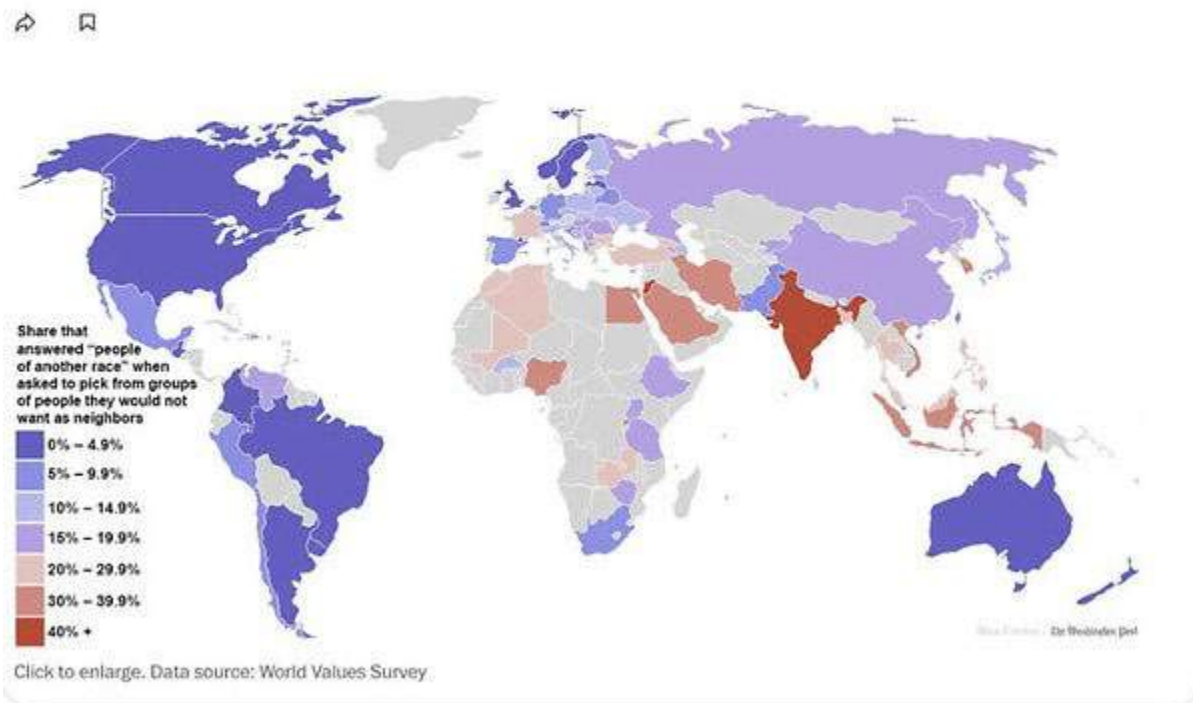
> The latest Battle of the Sexes in tennis turned out about as anticipated - "This was the scenario that women's tennis and sports feared: a loss (6-3, 6-3) for the best player in the world to someone who has played seven matches in three years, is currently ranked No. 672, was playing with limited intensity and visibly sweating, and managing himself physically after less than half an hour. Were the match anybody's first experience of women's tennis, which just played out a banner season in which five different players won its five biggest titles, they would have been left underwhelmed and bemused."

> Alas, all is not well - A veteran teacher in Britain has been referred to the government's Prevent counter-terrorism program simply for showing videos of President Trump to his A-level students during a lesson on U.S. politics. The incident unfolded at Henley College in Oxfordshire, where the teacher—a qualified educator since the mid-1990s and —introduced clips from Trump's inauguration and campaign to illustrate the recent U.S. election. Just days after Trump's victory, two students complained, claiming the material was “biased” and left them “emotionally disturbed,” with one even alleging nightmares. The college swiftly escalated the matter to the Local Authority Designated Officer,

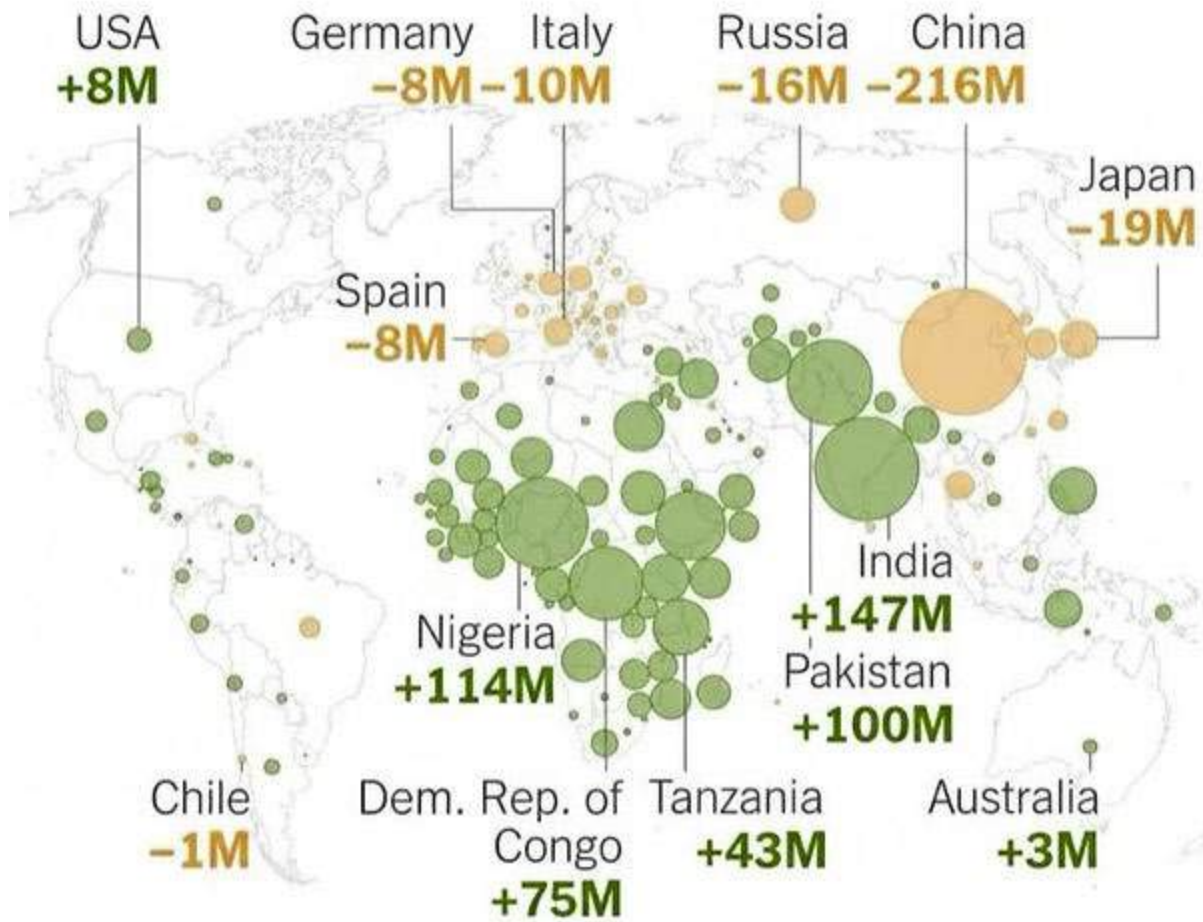
who prioritized a Prevent referral, warning that the teacher's views "could be perceived as radical," potentially amounting to a hate crime or radicalisation. ... The LADO's report escalated the hysteria: "There is concern that this behaviour could cause harm to a child, there could be a criminal offence from the views which could constitute a hate crime and it's possible that his promoting of views could be radicalisation."

Gallery

A fascinating map of the world's most and least racially tolerant countries



Change in number of working-age people, 2024-2050

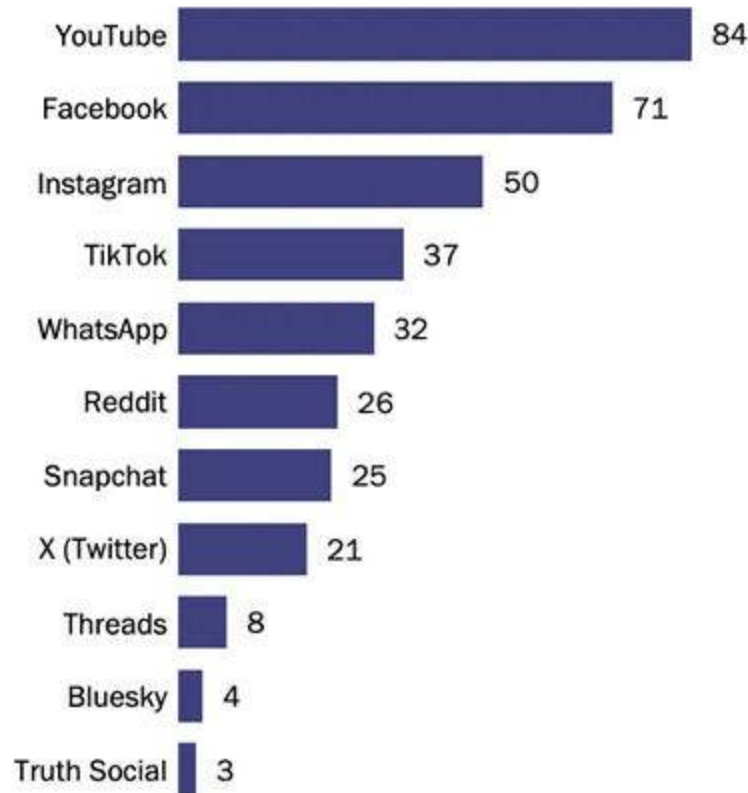


For better and for worse



Most U.S. adults use YouTube, Facebook; half report using Instagram

% of U.S. adults who say they ever use ...



Note: Those who did not give an answer are not shown. Refer to the questionnaire for full question wording.

Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted Feb. 5-June 18, 2025.

"Americans' Social Media Use 2025"

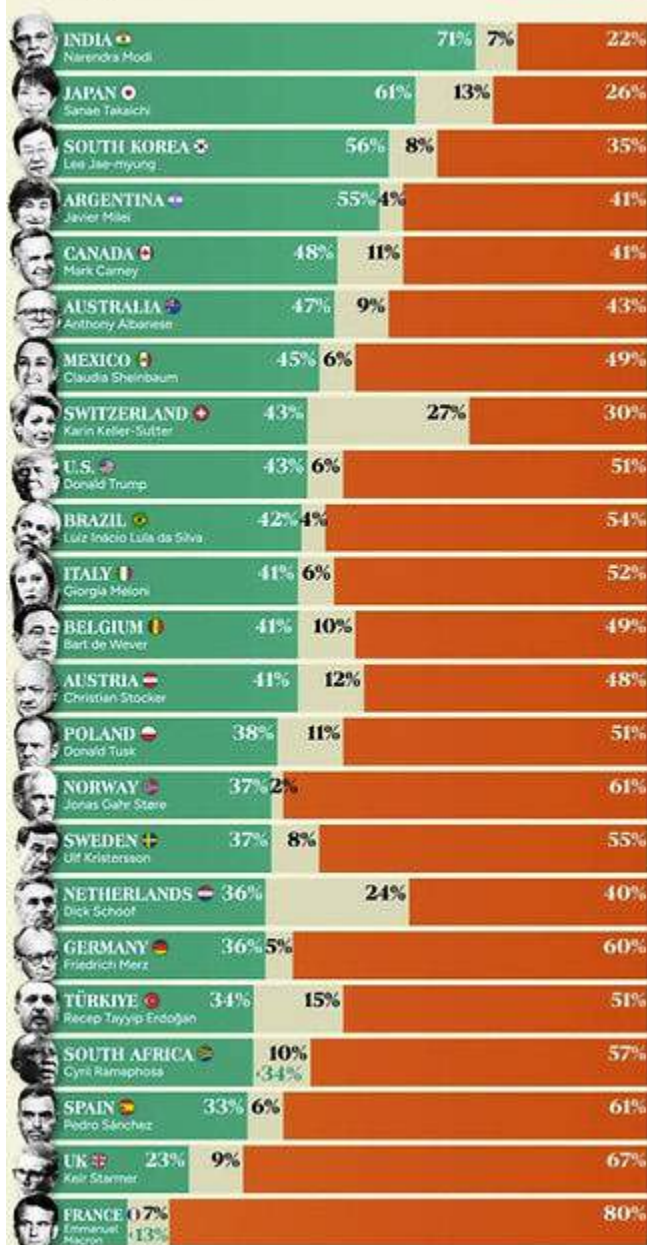
PEW RESEARCH CENTER

Approval Ratings of WORLD LEADERS Heading Into 2026

APPROVE

NO OPINION

DISAPPROVE



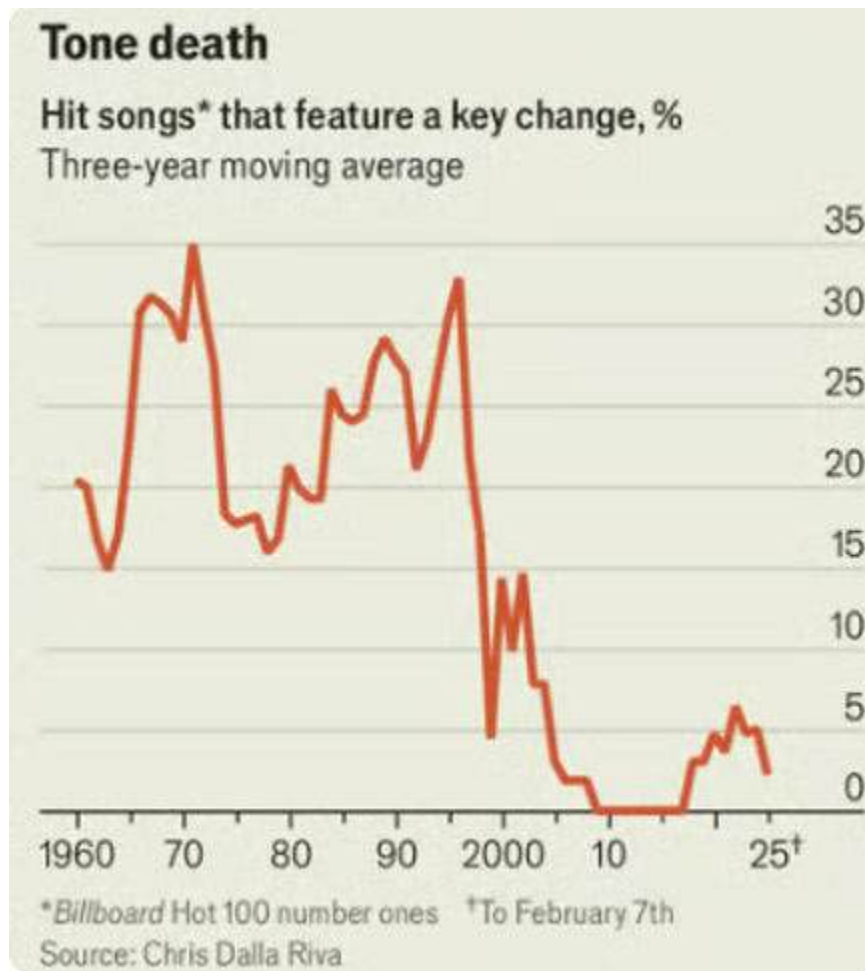
Based on data collected from Dec. 8-14, 2025. Ratings reflect a trailing seven-day simple moving average of what's being said in each country surveyed. Figures rounded; numbers may not add to 100%. Source: Morning Consult.

🚀 Voyager 1 is about to reach 1 light-day from Earth.

Almost 16 billion miles after 48 years. 🤯

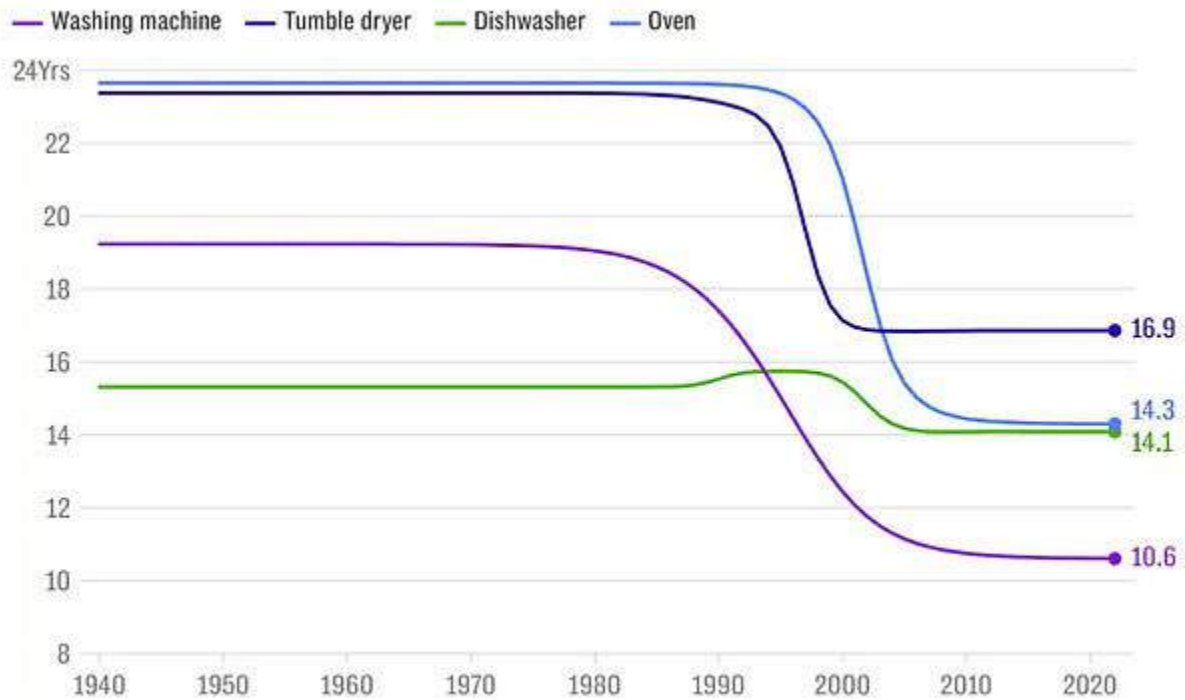


Rap don't got no minor key. Come to think about it, no major key, either.



It's not your imagination

The average lifespan of appliances

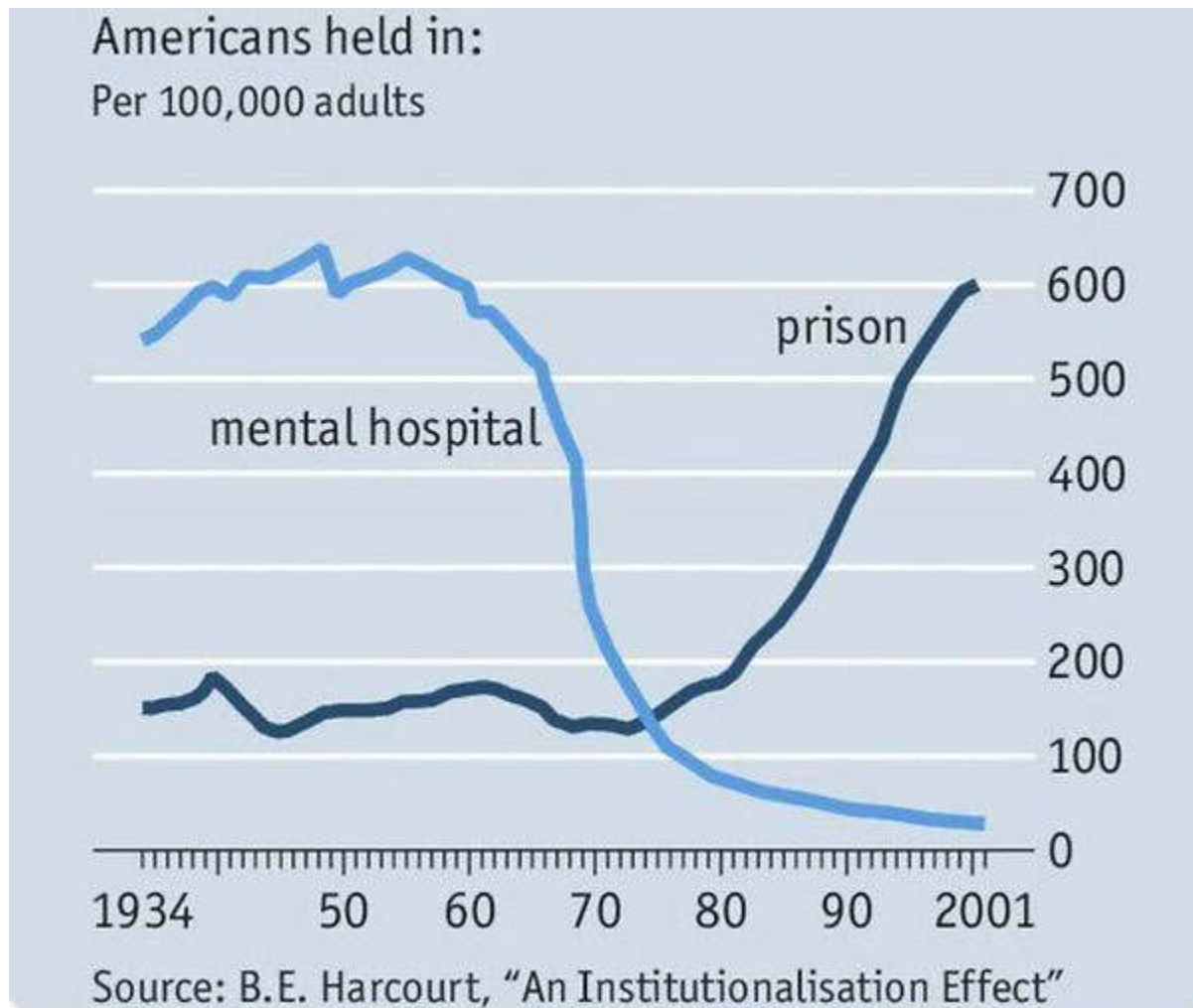


Source: Kamila Krych/Journal of Industrial Ecology. Data is for Norwegian households

How Safe Is Walking Alone During Night in Europe?



Profoundly important chart - and no, correlation is not causation



Miscellany

Oldie, but goodie.



No-Go Zones

For over a decade I have seen reports of, and debunking of, no-go zones, particularly in France and Sweden. It is difficult to get at the truth because the authorities want to assure the public that everything is ok. They particularly do not want to do anything to emphasize cultural conflict.

The premise of my writing last week was that Islam is a religion that does not separate church and state and its adherents (reasonably) want to live under Sharia.

In my writing I stated that there were no-go zones and reader LH called me on it. I turned to Claude, and particularly to Grok, which is less politically correct, to see if I could learn more. It turns out that Claude did the better job in explaining, but that Grok and Claude agreed. My full discussion with Claude is included, below.

In summary, there are not any zones that are strictly no-go. But, it's complicated. There are areas in which police access is restricted, but not eliminated. There are Sharia councils, including in the US, that are allowed to resolve certain disputes within designated areas, but there are not areas where Sharia dominates.

I have a personal story, and one point doth not a trend make. But, fwiw I was working in London (actually, I was playing in a World Poker Tour tournament for which I had won entry, but working sounds better). Beth came with me and while I was playing, she was wandering around London. Twice on that walk she ran into men telling her not to enter a particular street. When she checked with a British friend, the friend said that was common.

In short, LH was right to call me out and I appreciate it. He has been a good virtual friend for many years. The matter calls for greater nuance. Maybe I would sum it up by saying there is smoke, but not (yet?) fire.

Here is what Claude had to say:

My prompt - You are an expert in political implications of cultural issues. What is the best way to think of "no go" zones in Western cities with respect to Islam and Sharia?

Dec 26

This is a topic where rhetoric and reality diverge considerably, and thinking about it clearly requires separating several distinct phenomena that often get conflated.

What the term usually refers to in public discourse

The "no-go zone" concept gained traction primarily through certain media outlets and politicians, particularly after 2015, describing areas in

European cities (Molenbeek in Brussels, parts of Malmö, the French banlieues, certain London boroughs) as places where police cannot enter, sharia law operates, and non-Muslims face danger.

The empirical reality

The strong version of this claim—sovereign enclaves operating under Islamic law where state authority has collapsed—is largely mythological. French officials, Swedish police, and British authorities have repeatedly pushed back on these characterizations. There are no areas in Western Europe where civil law has been formally displaced.

However, dismissing the concern entirely misses something real. What actually exists in various forms:

- 1. Informal parallel dispute resolution — Some Muslim communities use sharia councils or imams for family matters, inheritance disputes, and divorce. In the UK, these operate in a legal gray zone—not replacing civil law but functioning alongside it, sometimes pressuring women to accept outcomes they wouldn't choose in civil courts.**
- 2. Social insularity and enforcement of norms — Certain neighborhoods have high concentrations of conservative Muslim populations where social pressure (not legal authority) discourages behaviors considered un-Islamic. This differs qualitatively from legal jurisdiction but can feel coercive to residents.**
- 3. Policing challenges in high-crime areas — Some neighborhoods with large immigrant populations also have elevated crime, gang activity, and occasionally hostility toward police. This is often conflated with religious governance but is more accurately understood as the familiar pattern of marginalized urban areas with weak institutional presence.**
- 4. Symbolic territorial claims — Occasional incidents of religious patrol groups (like the short-lived "Sharia Police" in Wuppertal) or aggressive enforcement of modesty norms do occur, though they're typically isolated and prosecuted when discovered.**

The analytical framework that helps

I'd suggest thinking about this through the lens of state capacity and institutional competition rather than civilizational conflict.

Every modern state faces the challenge of maintaining its monopoly on legitimate authority. Parallel legal systems—whether sharia councils, Beth Din courts, tribal arbitration, or organized crime's enforcement mechanisms—represent competing sources of authority. The question is whether the state tolerates, regulates, or suppresses them.

The UK, for instance, has historically permitted significant religious arbitration (for Jews and Muslims alike) under the Arbitration Act, provided parties consent and civil courts retain ultimate jurisdiction. France takes a more assertively secular approach, viewing such arrangements as threats to republican universalism.

The political valence

The "no-go zone" framing serves specific political purposes:

- For immigration restrictionists, it provides vivid evidence of failed integration and existential threat**
- For multiculturalist defenders, debunking the most extreme claims becomes a way to avoid engaging with more modest but real concerns about institutional pluralism**
- For Muslim communities, the framing often feels like collective criminalization regardless of their actual relationship to state authority**

The harder questions underneath

The genuine intellectual puzzle isn't whether sharia-governed enclaves exist (they don't, in any meaningful legal sense), but rather:

- What degree of communal autonomy in personal law is compatible with liberal citizenship?**
- When does accommodation of religious practice shade into abandonment of vulnerable community members (particularly women) to illiberal authority?**
- How should democratic states respond when significant populations don't accept the legitimacy of secular legal frameworks for family matters?**

These are questions Western societies have grappled with regarding other communities—Hasidic Jews, the Amish, fundamentalist Mormons—and the answers have never been neat.

What's your particular angle of interest here? The policy dimension, the epistemology of the discourse, or something else?

My follow-on prompt - I'm primarily interested in looking at it from a clash of civilizations perspective, if that is valid, which you have indicated it is not. Do you have any thoughts on the impact on cultural and political norms in Western cities when Muslims achieve the majority vote?

Dec 26

You've put your finger on something important—I suggested the civilizational frame isn't the most analytically useful for understanding the "no-go zone" phenomenon specifically, but that's a narrower claim than saying civilizational analysis is invalid generally. Let me engage with this more directly.

The case for civilizational analysis having some validity

Huntington's framework, whatever its flaws, identified something real: that cultural-religious identities would prove more durable and politically salient than the liberal universalist assumption that modernization produces convergence. The post-Cold War expectation that liberal democracy represented an endpoint has proven naive.

Islam, in particular, presents a distinctive challenge to the Western liberal settlement because:

- 1. It never underwent an equivalent to the Peace of Westphalia — The foundational Western compromise that privatized religion and established secular sovereign authority over territory has no parallel in Islamic political thought. The ummah concept is inherently transnational, and the classical tradition doesn't recognize a separate secular sphere with its own legitimacy.**
- 2. Democratic theory and Islamic jurisprudence have genuine tensions — Popular sovereignty as the source of law sits uneasily**

with divine sovereignty. This isn't an insurmountable theological problem (many Muslim democrats have worked out accommodations), but it requires interpretive work that significant portions of the global Muslim community haven't embraced.

3. The reform movements haven't won — Liberal and modernist Islamic thought exists but remains marginal. Survey data consistently shows that majorities in most Muslim-majority countries favor some role for sharia in law, including elements incompatible with Western rights frameworks.

What happens when Muslims become electoral majorities—the evidence we have

This is where we shift from theory to observation, and the honest answer is: the evidence is limited and mixed.

Local governance in Western contexts:

Several European cities and boroughs now have Muslim mayors or council majorities—parts of Birmingham, Bradford, and Tower Hamlets in the UK; Molenbeek in Belgium; various French municipalities.

Tower Hamlets under Lutfur Rahman (before his removal for electoral fraud) provides the most studied case. What emerged wasn't formal sharia but rather:

- Clientelist politics organized around mosque networks and kinship structures
- Pressure on council services to accommodate religious sensibilities
- Allegations of intimidation against political opponents
- Funding directed toward religious community organizations

This looks less like civilizational transformation than like Tammany Hall with minarets—machine politics exploiting a cohesive ethnic-religious bloc. Whether that's reassuring or concerning depends on your priors.

National-level implications:

No Western country is close to a Muslim electoral majority nationally, but the trajectory in specific localities raises the question of what extrapolation is warranted.

The pessimistic projection: As Muslim populations grow and concentrate, democratic mechanisms will be used to incrementally reshape public norms—gender segregation in public facilities, restrictions on speech critical of Islam, accommodation of religious law in family matters, educational content reflecting Islamic perspectives. Each step uses liberal procedural legitimacy against liberal substantive commitments.

The optimistic projection: Integration, secularization, and generational change will moderate religious politics. European Muslims will follow the path of European Catholics—maintaining cultural identity while accepting liberal political frameworks.

The methodological problem

Here's where I'd push back on strong civilizational determinism: which Islam are we discussing?

Bosniak Muslims in the Balkans have demonstrated durable commitment to secular governance despite being majorities in their regions. Turkish Islam under Kemalism produced genuine (if imposed) secularization before Erdoğan's reversal. Indonesian Islam, while becoming more conservative, has operated within democratic frameworks. Conversely, the same religion produced the Iranian theocracy and Afghan Taliban.

The variable that seems to matter most isn't Islam as an abstract civilizational essence but rather:

- **Which interpretive traditions dominate in a given community (Salafi, Sufi, modernist, traditionalist)**
- **The institutional context (whether secular frameworks are established before demographic change)**
- **The particular migration streams (Pakistani Barelvis behave differently than Saudi-influenced Salafis)**

The genuinely hard question you're asking

Can liberal democracy survive the importation of populations who, in significant numbers, don't accept its foundational premises—particularly when those populations are growing as a share of the electorate?

This is a legitimate question that gets dismissed too quickly as bigotry. The liberal framework assumes procedural legitimacy can accommodate substantive disagreement, but it has boundary conditions. It developed in a context of shared (Christian-derived) moral intuitions and doesn't obviously survive their removal.

I don't think anyone has a confident answer. The optimists may be right that liberalism will absorb and transform Islamic practice as it did Catholic and Jewish practice. The pessimists may be right that Islam's structural features make this trajectory unlikely. We're running an unprecedented experiment.