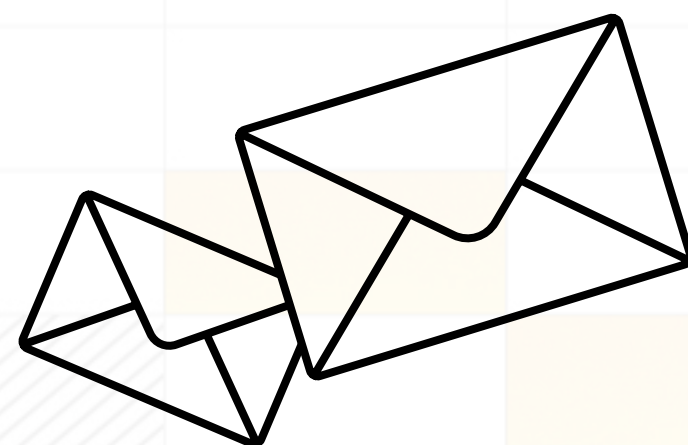


Welcome, Political Forecast aficionados, to our February edition. It's been an eventful start to the year, with whip losses, legislative U-turns, plus the never-ending saga of one newly inaugurated man and his Doge.

Today's forecast includes our read-out of Scottish Labour Conference, Trump's tariff terrors, and reflections on how Ramadan is observed in and around UK Parliament.

As ever, if you're looking for Public Affairs counsel to navigate the political landscape and support your business objectives, drop us a line.



THE POLITICAL FORECAST

PARLIAMENTARY PULSE

LABOUR OF LOVE?

Scottish Labour Conference took place over the weekend and came off the back of several national polls showing significant drop-off in support for Labour in Scotland off after successes in last July's general election (those 37 MPs were mentioned a lot over the weekend!). In an attempt to stem the tide, Anas Sarwar announced plans to cut red tape, shake up the NHS in Scotland and commit to introduce a Department of Government Efficiency (alas Elon Musk). Meanwhile the Prime Minister in his Sunday speech committed £200m for the future of Grangemouth. And in reaction to those recent polls, Sarwar and the Labour leadership have made the most of recent council by-election victories, which they say demonstrate the national polls aren't telling the whole story. The build up to the 2026 Holyrood election has well and truly begun!

SORRY AI'M LATE

The AI bill – originally expected to be published before Christmas – likely won't reach Parliament before summer. According to Labour sources, a version of the bill had been drafted in late 2024, but Trump's return to power has put the brakes on as ministers contemplate how to attract AI investment into the UK, and keep US-UK relations warm. The UK's Washington Ambassador Peter Mandelson is said to be on a serious US charm offensive, after both the UK and the US refused to sign the Paris declaration earlier this year.

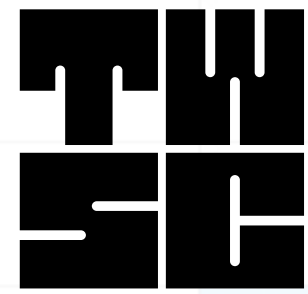
WE ARE THE CHAMPIONS

Labour's list of regional champions is growing, with new appointments covering everything from retail to high street business and technology to manufacturing. It looks like every sector will have an appointed champion to talk to industry, public and experts – which means a LOT of brand new MPs are being given specific focus areas, and remits to proactively go out and engage off the bat. It seems that all of Labour's pre-election rhetoric about being "mission-led" is taking shape.

AD-DY ISSUES

The latest government clampdown on advertising for "less healthy foods" is shaking up the whole of Westminster. Central to the debate is the interpretation of legislation consulted on several years ago – which the Government had formerly said meant one thing, but now the regulator (acting on independent legal advice) says means another.

Originally aimed at fighting childhood obesity, the new reading of the regulations now risks widespread penalising of more subtly branded ads. It leaves big businesses facing uncertainty from the U-turn, with massive sunk costs on advertising that may well now be unusable – a not-so-sweet deal. With a new consultation currently open, and a hard deadline for final guidance to be implemented in October 2025, Starmer and his Cabinet risk feeling the combined wrath of the Food & Drink, Manufacturing and Creative Industries – not to mention one hell of a legal headache. The question now is: how willing is the Government to tread on the toes of the regulator?



BEYOND THE BUBBLE

WHISKY BUSINESS

The Scotch whisky industry and Scottish politicians have criticised the UK Government's **plans** to legally define English single malt whisky, as it risks undermining the reputation of the Scottish sector.

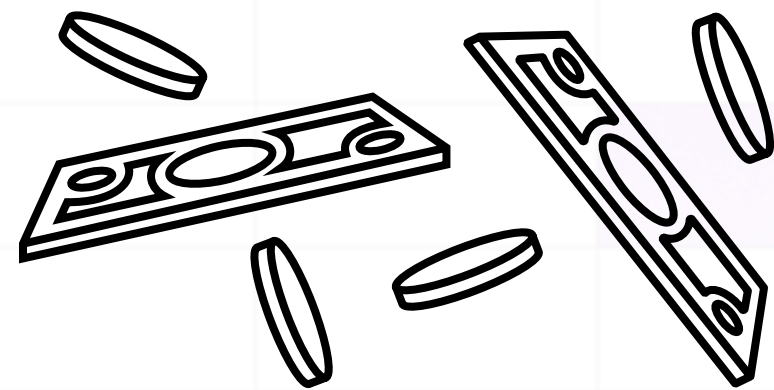
Currently, single malt Scotch must be made in one single distillery. However, new rules being considered by the Defra could see English whisky being made in several different locations. The Scotch Whisky Association (SWA) has been leading the charge against the plans, which are the latest in a series of unpopular policy decisions from the UK Government, including higher alcohol duty. The move calls into question whether the Prime Minister is still committed to "back Scotch producers to the hilt" and invest in Brand Scotland.



POLITICS IN NUMBERS

£60 BILLION

The value of UK exports to the US that would be affected by Trump's potential blanket tariff, based on 2023 figures. It seems that Starmer's cabinet and major UK industries had better *steel* themselves (pun intended).



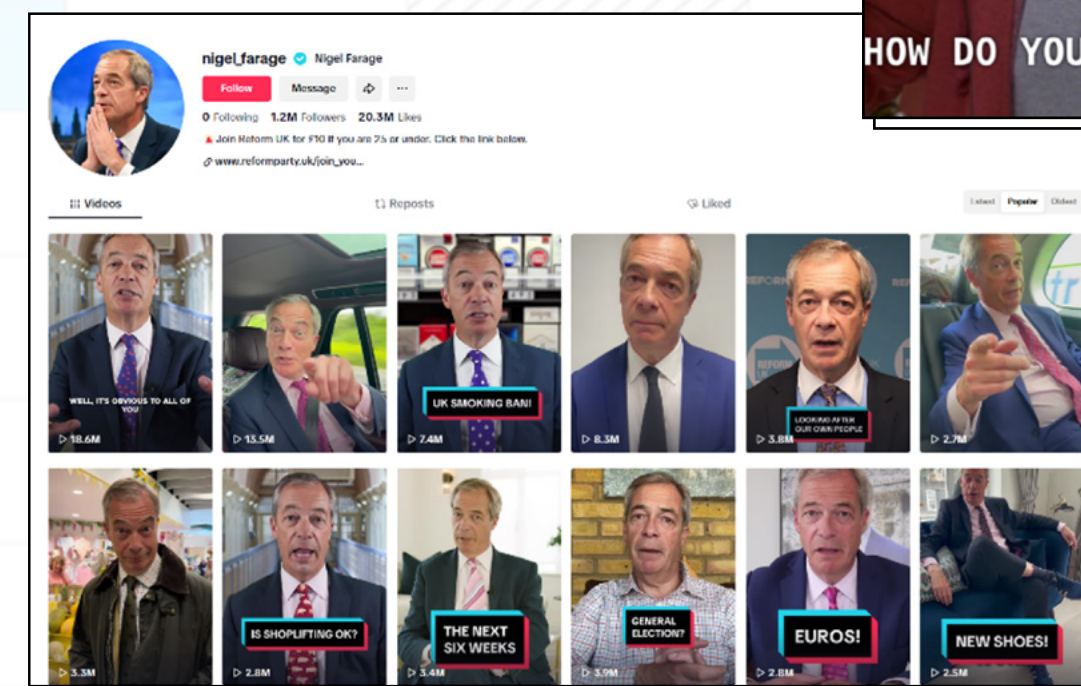
VIRAL VIEW

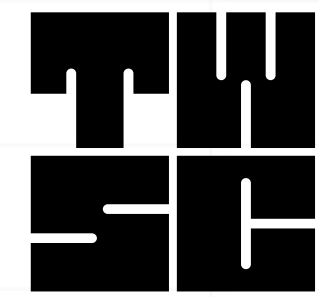
Mainstream political parties have leveraged their TikTok accounts in an attempt to reach the youth vote, whether it be the Labour Party's constant stream of good news initiatives or the Conservative Party leader Kemi Badenoch once again telling us her first ever job was in McDonalds.

Enter Nigel Farage. The controversial Reform UK leader has embraced the app as a way to make right-wing parties appeal to younger voters – not something they're typically known for...

Farage's personal TikTok page has a whopping 1.2 million followers, with some of his frequent posts reaching almost 19 million views! His party's page has 367,000 – still miles ahead of Labour on 230,000 and the Conservatives in a distant third on 89,000.

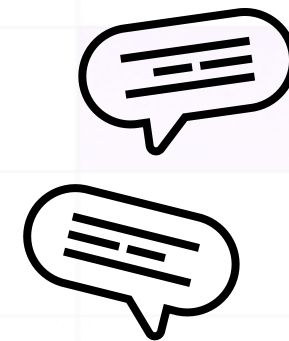
Farage's bio does not shy away from his intentions. Alongside a link to the Reform website, he states "Join Reform UK for £10 if you are 25 or under". Watch out Keir and Kemi; there's a new kid on the block, and he's had a serious digital glow-up...





QUOTE OF 2025 SO FAR...

**Nigel Farage is
a “great guy”**

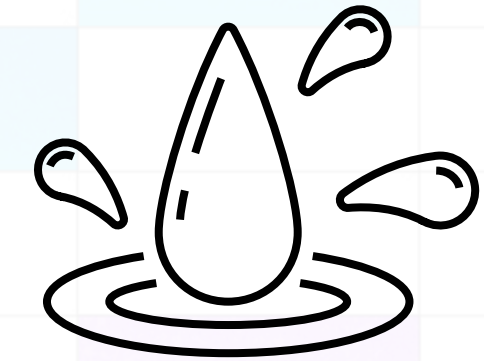


President, Donald Trump

At the Conservative Political Action Conference this week, President Trump took a moment to shower the Reform UK leader with praise. Well, what’s a Trump speech without a little international bromance?

MAKING A SPLASH IN 2025

Keir Starmer’s meeting with Donald Trump brought big wins for the UK, with Ukraine and NATO’s future at stake. Starmer played it smart, using a letter from King Charles inviting Trump for a state visit to break the ice. He also promised increased defence spending, strengthening NATO ties. On trade, Trump softened his stance, suggesting a potential tariff-free deal with the UK, though he stayed tough on the EU. The main challenge was Ukraine, where Starmer pushed for stronger security guarantees, but Trump didn’t budge much. The US-UK relationship will shift, with Starmer needing to balance staying friendly with Trump whilst demonstrating to UK voters that he is defending his values.



OBSERVING RAMADAN IN UK PARLIAMENT

A reflection by Thayeeba Shikdar, our Associate in the London Public Affairs team

Ramadan has gained increasing recognition in the UK political sphere in recent years, reflecting a growing commitment to inclusivity and respect for Muslim traditions within British political institutions. This week marked the official start of Ramadan celebrations, with the Mayor of London, Sir Sadiq Khan, switching on the Ramadan Lights at Piccadilly Circus for the third consecutive year.

In Parliament, Ramadan serves as both a time of personal reflection, and a chance for interfaith dialogue championing shared values like compassion, community and generosity. MPs observe and respect the significance of the month, blending personal religious observance with their public roles, and showcasing the UK’s diverse political and cultural landscape.

Parliamentary debates on topics like religious freedom, multiculturalism, and social cohesion often take centre stage during Ramadan, as MPs reflect on how to build a more inclusive society for people of all faiths.

For Muslim MPs and others observing Ramadan, fasting from dawn until sunset is a central part of the month, requiring them to abstain from eating or drinking during daylight hours. This can be particularly challenging in Parliament, where long, demanding sessions are the norm. To support fasting MPs, the schedule for debates, questions, and votes is often adjusted. In some cases, sitting hours are modified so MPs can attend evening prayers and Iftar - the meal to break the fast after sunset.

Many Muslim MPs also participate in Iftar events within Parliament and in their local communities. For instance, annual Iftar receptions are hosted by organisations like the Muslim Council of Britain (MCB) or the All-Party Parliamentary Group on British Muslims. These events bring together both Muslim and non-Muslim MPs, fostering interfaith solidarity and promoting unity.