

SUBJECT CHALLENGES

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS & POLITICS



WHY STUDY INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS AND POLITICS?

- It is, shall we say, an interesting time to be alive
- The world faces enormous challenges
- Many of them are so acute they might make you want to stay in bed and pull the blanket over your head
- But another way of looking at matters is to consider that we are living in epochal-changing times. Whatever happens over the next few years, we have every chance of shaping the future (but not if we're holed up in bed!)
- Let's have a look at some of the challenges we face, beginning with one that really impacts young people...



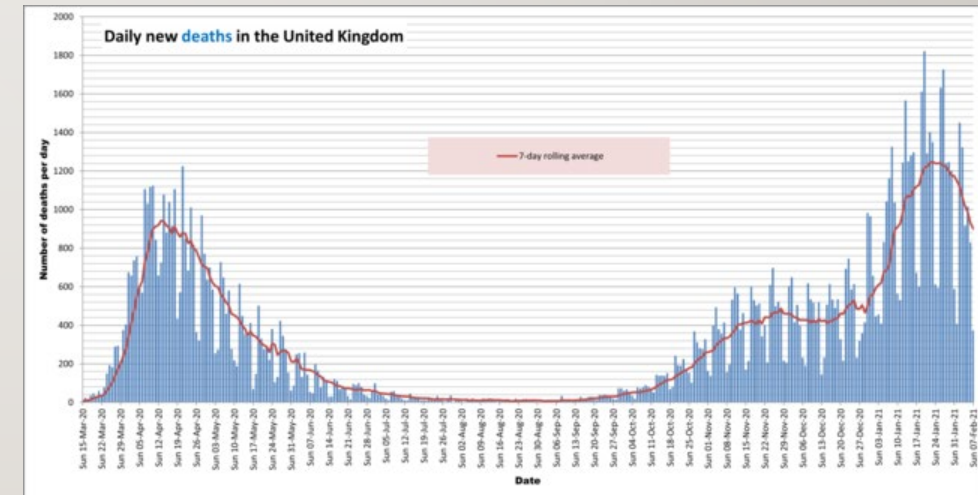
WHO WOULD BE YOUNG? THE HOUSING CRISIS

- The UK has a housing crisis: in recent decades the cost of buying a home has risen faster than wages, leaving many workers priced out of the market.
- In some parts of the country, low-deposit mortgages are no help, because would-be homeowners cannot afford the monthly repayments on the mortgages they will need, leaving them in the position of needing to save large sums to put down.
- High private sector rents make this difficult – and also mean that in some areas 40% of tenants need state help to pay their monthly housing bills. Affordable social housing has become scarcer, leaving many households with no choice but to rent – often paying more than they would for a mortgage (McMullan *et al.* “UK Housing Crisis”, 31 March 2021. *The Guardian*).
- Who is representing the young and dispossessed?



COVID

- The Covid 19 outbreak has been arguably the worst pandemic since the Spanish influenza of 1918-20.
- The UK has suffered grievously, with over 100,000 fatalities (and countless numbers of people suffering long Covid)
- But in other parts of the world we have witnessed an even worse death toll
- The government is faced with balancing opening up the economy with the potential for a third wave



THE RISE OF THE ALT-RIGHT

- This image was taken in Charlottesville, during the Unite the Right rally in August 2017. This was not a one-off event
- The alt-right has made gains in many countries, and shows no sign of losing popularity
- It has not gone unnoticed that its rise has coincided with a widespread dissatisfaction with democracy
- And now ideas once unthinkable are becoming increasingly mainstream



BLACK LIVES MATTER

- The killing of George Floyd in Minneapolis caught global attention
- The murder was captured on video, and highlighted the many injustices suffered by minority communities in the USA and beyond
- The BLM movement has been championed by various celebrities and sportspeople and remains an active political issue
- But there has been a backlash; “taking a knee” has been met with resistance (witness the booing at the recent England vs Romania international).



DEMOCRACY IN ECLIPSE?

- The US Capitol attack of 6 January 2021
- To this day, large numbers of US voters believe that the Presidential election of November 2020 was stolen, and that Donald Trump – and not Joe Biden – is the rightful President. There are allegations in the Twittersphere suggesting Mr Trump will be reinstated at some point this year
- Thus far, the wheels of justice have moved slowly in holding the 1/6 perpetrators to account. The US Senate declined to conduct an investigation into the attack.
- What happens next time?...



BREXIT

- Did you *really* think you would get this far without mention being made of the elephant in the room?
- We won't debate the whys and wherefores of Brexit right here (we can do that in a seminar at some point!) but there is no denying that the run up to the referendum and subsequent discussions have been polarising
- The UK has now departed the EU, but that does not mean Brexit (or its fallout) will disappear from political discourse any time soon



AND PERHAPS *THE* BIGGEST ISSUE OF ALL

- The Climate Emergency
- If the forecasts are correct, we could be dealing with the consequences of some major disasters within your lifetime (global heating, desertification, water shortages, food shortages, energy disruption etc.).
- How we deal with these issues is perhaps one of the biggest questions that humanity will face in this century



SO WHY STUDY INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS AND POLITICS?

- The above represent a small snapshot of the challenges that humanity faces
- We could, for example, have mentioned terrorism, falling real wages, pensions and the like
- All of these are major issues; in fact wicked issues
- So the question really should be – why would you choose *not* to study International Relations and Politics?