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CARNEY'S FOREIGN POLICY AND THE "NEW WORLD ORDER"

BY QUINLIN OSADCZUK

Foreign affairs rarely holds much influence over the politics of any country; it is certainly the more compelling topic, as it often pits one country against another as they both try to find the best possible deal out of a situation. Nevertheless, most politics inevitably find themselves centered around more boring topics: inflation, housing, and so on tend to be more pressing and relevant in everyday people's lives, and any attention towards foreign affairs has historically been a rarity.

Evidently, for Canada in the past two years, that has not been the case. Between Trump's myriad claims of making Canada into America's 51st state, or in America's recent escapades surrounding Venezu-



Photo courtesy of Denis Balibouse (Associated Press)

ela and Greenland, foreign affairs have proven an imminently relevant topic for many Canadians.

Given that instability, it would seem that Prime Minister Mark Carney is doing what any banker does

best: diversifying his interests. Whereas Canada has had a uniquely close relationship with America for most of both countries' histories, including an on-again off-again exemption from the tariffs which Trump has

otherwise plastered abroad, it would seem that Carney has taken the opportunity to make a generationally impactful shift away from America.

POLICY continued on page 2

Film Education at UBCO or the Lack Thereof?: A Conversation with Denise Kenney

BY GABRIELA CHAN

Why don't we have a film major at UBCO? With this question in mind, I interviewed Professor Denise Kenney from the Faculty of Creative and Critical Studies, discussing the barriers and benefits to teaching Film at the Okanagan campus.

INTERVIEW continued on page 3

All That Glitters... Is Gay!

BY WENDELL ZYLSTRA

The question of whether or not cishet actors should play queer characters is one that has been re-heated again and again throughout history, but still remains unanswered... So as 'hockey-lovers' takes on a whole new meaning in Heated Rivalry, will we finally have an answer?

ANSWER continued on page 6

Populism, Progressives, and the Democratic Party

BY AIDEN MALCOLM

Is it already Joeever for the democrats?

ARTICLE continued on page 7

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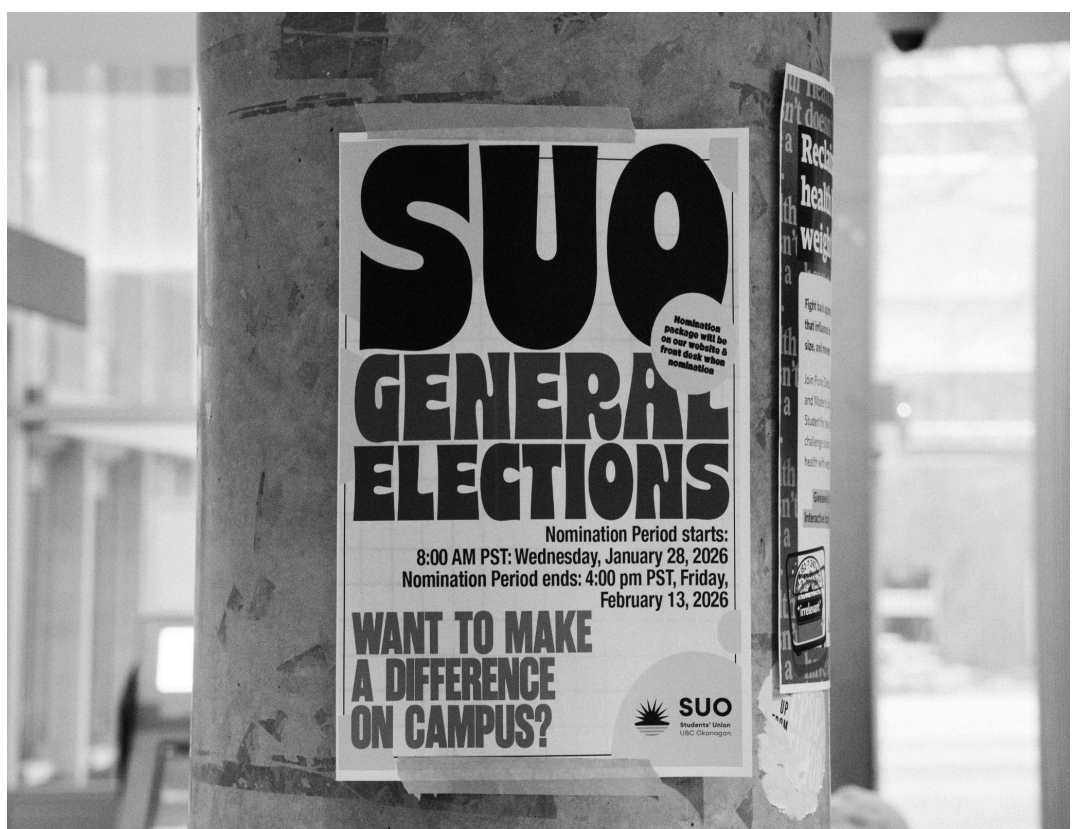
Where the SUO is Heading: A Conversation with President Peter Idoko

BY CHARLOTTE TAPPIN

One month into the second semester, and new things are on the horizon. In conversation with Student Union Okanagan's (SUO) President, Peter Idoko, he reflected on how his team can feel how tired students are as they push through to the end of the term. Currently, the SUO is focusing on ending the year on a good note.

The SUO executive committee has focused a lot this year on lobbying for students at various student forums across the province. Rising tuition and living costs are hard on everyone, so Vice President External, Olivia Lai, along with the British Columbia Federation of Students have been working to ensure students will not suffer excess financial burden while pursuing their goals in post-secondary.

Efforts to fight food insecurity have also had massive success this year, as the SUO has attained thousands of dollars in funding to support their food bank, Pantry, as well as their Community Meals initiative. With the fu-



Provided by Sabhya Arora

ture in mind, there is no plan to stop providing food to students, replacing worries on their plates with free and nutritious meals.

As for campus life, the SUO board is putting together more ways they can give back to the clubs who

contribute so much to the vibrant campus community at UBC Okanagan. Plans for the next Heatwave concert are also in the works, and students should expect an even more exciting concert on campus as the SUO takes their feedback and works it into their plans.

Parties are still on the agenda for the rest of the year, but the SUO is still sticking to their mission of diversifying what they offer to students and wants to commit to a variety of events for all students to enjoy.

CONVERSATION continued on 2

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Foreign affairs rarely holds much influence over the politics of any country; it is certainly the more compelling topic, as it often pits one country against another as they both try to find the best possible deal out of a situation. Nevertheless, most politics inevitably find themselves centered around more boring topics: inflation, housing, and so on tend to be more pressing and relevant in everyday people's lives, and any attention towards foreign affairs has historically been a rarity.

Evidently, for Canada in the past two years, that has not been the case. Between Trump's myriad claims of making Canada into America's 51st state, or in America's recent escapades surrounding Venezuela and Greenland, foreign affairs have proven an imminently relevant topic for many Canadians.

Given that instability, it would seem that Prime Minister Mark Carney is doing what any banker does best: diversifying his interests. Whereas Canada has had a uniquely close relationship with America for most of both countries' histories, including an on-again off-again exemption from the tariffs which Trump has otherwise plastered abroad, it would seem that Carney has taken the opportunity to make a generationally impactful shift away from America.

First, Carney met with President Xi Jinping of the People's Republic of China, renegotiating Canada's trade relationship with China, and broadly attempting to build goodwill between Canada and China in doing so.

The deal is as follows: Canada and China have various tariffs against one another, to encourage their businesses to buy lo-



Photo courtesy of Denis Balibouse (Associated Press)

cally rather than from abroad. Therefore, in order to improve their shared relationship, both sides have agreed to cut certain tariffs — a decision which has had immediate political ramifications. Canada agreed to reduce their tariffs on Chinese electric vehicles (EVs) from 100% to 9.6%, which had been in place beforehand to promote EV production in Ontario. As a result, businesses will be more likely to buy those products from China, which are of a comparable quality but are now considerably cheaper. In exchange, China agreed to cut its tariffs by similar amounts on Canadian agricultural goods, like canola seed, seafood, beef, and more — something that massively benefits the Maritimes and prairie provinces like Saskatchewan and Alberta.¹

The response to this development has been stark: Saskatchewan's Premier Scott

Moe has praised Carney's actions, while Ontario's Premier Doug Ford has harshly criticized the deal. Nevertheless, these material changes pale in comparison to the attention that the recent rhetoric that the prime minister employed at Davos has found.

Speaking before multiple world leaders, Carney's speech has internationally been recognized as the death knell of the post-Cold War liberal international order. To briefly paraphrase, Carney stated that the international system in which countries agreed to work with one another through international organizations like the United Nations or World Health Organization was always a lie which only served to benefit those who were able to use those systems to their fullest extent, while it often failed to serve those nations which did not or could not use those systems the same way.

Carney's claim here isn't necessarily wrong: any number of examples come to mind wherein international organizations like the United Nations or North Atlantic Treaty Organization take a more active role in international crises which threaten wealthier nations, as was the case with the collapse of Yugoslavia through the 1990s, while those same organizations ignore similar crises peripheral to wealthier states, such as the Rwandan Genocide or the ongoing war in Sudan today. Nevertheless, while his diagnosis of current affairs is agreed upon by many, his prescribed solution is what has generated considerable controversy, as he and other world leaders who spoke at Davos motioned towards closer relationships with China.

It is likely that those nations which are choosing to draw closer to China while keeping the door open to the United States are cognizant of the role of the "Non-Aligned Movement" in the Cold War. That formal, loose alliance of countries declared their intent to stay out of any conflicts between America and the Soviet Union, instead choosing to lure in the financial aid of both East and Western powers, keeping itself in a state of neutrality. Following that line of thinking, it would seem that Carney's foreign policy is not intent on making Canada a close ally of China, but a friend to both America and China at the same time. Whether it's a strategy that works, however, remains to be seen.

1. Moritsugu, Ken and Rob Gillies. "Canada has agreed to cut its 100% tariff on Chinese electric cars in return for lower tariffs on Canadian farm products," KDH News, January 16th, 2026, https://kdhnews.com/business/canada-agrees-to-cut-tariff-on-chinese-evs-in-return-for-lower-tariffs-on-canadian/article_2235ff9c-fb48-57e2-9c62-bfb1c9a2d261.html. Accessed January 29th, 2026.

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Efforts to fight food insecurity have also had massive success this year, as the SUO has attained thousands of dollars in funding to support their food bank, Pantry, as well as their Community Meals initiative. With the future in mind, there is no plan to stop providing food to students, replacing worries on their plates with free and nutritious meals.

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sifying what they offer to students and wants to commit to a variety of events for all students to enjoy.

Importantly, SUO elections are coming up. Detailed information regarding the upcoming elections can be found on the SUO website,¹ but there are some important dates that all students should be aware of. The deadline for nominations to run for a position is February 14th, 2026, at 4pm. For those on the fence about running, there is still time, but applications should be submitted as soon as possible.

Following nominations, the campaigning period will take place from February 23rd, 2026, to March 6th, 2026. This is

the time for anyone running for a position to campaign on campus. During this time students can ask them questions, and begin deciding who they want to vote for in the forthcoming election. Debates will take place between candidates in this time period as scheduled by the SUO.

Voting will open online on March 3rd, 2026, at 8am. Information about where exactly to vote will be released by the SUO, and students can follow those instructions to vote accordingly. On March 6th, 2026, at 11:59pm, the online voting will close, and afterwards the winners of the election will be announced.

When asked what he wishes to

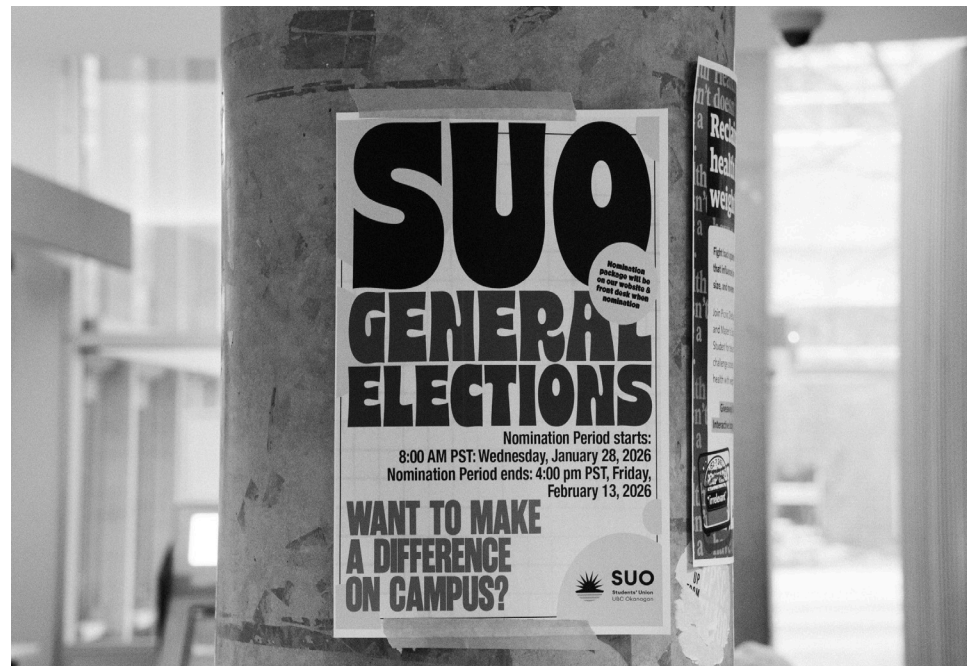
see from the next SUO executive committee, Idoko emphasized that the future board should remain involved with student affairs on campus:

"Have a spine, and keep the energy going. The amount of good the SUO can do within the student body is immense; if the next board is not ready to rise up to the occasion, the occasion will come to pass."

With the success over the last year, Idoko thinks it is very important to continue the precedent that has been set. A lot of trust has been gained with students, and the SUO has shown at various times that the Okanagan campus should be taken seriously as an institution. He recognizes that the SUO has a lot of power, which can do a lot of good. Instead of being caught up in the perks of being on the executive board, the elected members should ensure they are showing up for students.

Commenting on the different things the SUO can do for students, Idoko expressed that "we need more than one event to classify a good school year," stressing that the "next person needs to understand that and should try their best to meet the needs of the diverse student population." It is clear that Idoko does not want all of the work done this year to be swept away, instead it should be used as a starting point for the next board to do something even greater.

On a conclusive note, Idoko stated: "we need good people who will put in the time and effort, and who will advocate for UBCO to reach its fullest potential, because we have a lot of potential."



Provided by Sabhya Arora

1. <https://www.suo.ca/elections/>

Film Education at UBCO or the Lack Thereof?: A Conversation with Denise Kenney

BY GABRIELA CHAN

Films have immense value in the classroom. Whether it be theory or production, studying film opens our eyes to a generation's taste in media. Not only that, the movie screen is also home to some of the most phenomenal forms of visual storytelling and the most relevant social critiques of our day.

Despite how much our lives have come to revolve around screens, the study of screen media is rarely seen in elementary and high school curricula. At most, movie adaptations of canonical novels like *The Great Gatsby* or maybe a Hitchcock film are all you may encounter in high school literature classes.

In post-secondary education, recent years have seen a proliferation of film studies programs. In general, however, universities have not allocated the same abundance of resources to film in the way that they have for other arts subjects like political science and psychology.

A quick search through UBC Okanagan's courses listed on Workday and you will see a whopping result of *nine* film courses offered for the 2025–2026 Winter Session across both terms. Evidently, the small number of film courses leaves little room for a conversation about establishing a film major at this campus, but why don't we have one in the first place?

With this question in mind, I interviewed Professor Denise Kenney from UBCO's Faculty of Creative and Critical Studies. She is an experienced creator in theatre and filmmaking, and was instrumental in setting up UBCO's Interdisciplinary Performance degree, which has now evolved into a minor in Theatre.

In the following conversation, Kenney and I discuss the barriers and benefits of providing film education at the Okanagan campus, as well as the alternative avenues available for students to get involved in film production.

Gabriela Chan: Hi Denise! Please introduce yourself, your teaching history at UBCO, and your involvement in the Film courses offered at this campus.

Denise Kenney: I started at UBCO in 2007 after working for 20 years as a professional theatre performer, creator, and director, as well as a writer, director and producer for narrative and documentary film and television. Since 2007, I have created and/or taught the following film courses: Introduction to Film (FILM 100), Acting for Stage and Screen (FILM 103), Narrative Film Production (FILM 303), Digital Documentary Production (FILM 371), Writing with Media (FILM 474).

Chan: There is no option to major in film at UBCO. Why is that?

Kenney: Film production courses require resources. To date I have not been able to successfully lobby for those resources to be dedicated to a film production major. We are looking at creating a film stream within our Bachelor of Media Studies degree. I am optimistic that this is going to happen.

Chan: That sounds like something we can look forward to. What do you think students can gain from studying film?

Kenney: Students will likely spend more time watching film, television, and online digital content than doing most other things in their leisure time. Being literate in these forms improves both enjoyment in the process of viewing as well as empowerment in regards to digital ways of communicating. This is the kind of literacy that is absolutely necessary in order for us to navigate our personal and professional lives moving forward. I personally believe it to be profoundly important, regardless of one's major.

Chan: I love that you have pointed to the idea of digital literacy, and how it advances both personal enjoyment and interpersonal communication.

Here, let me take a small detour from the conversation between Kenney and I to unpack what we mean by being literate in digital content:

Films are loaded with meaning — I recall being in Kenney's Narrative Film Production course and working on a short comedy about two friends playing UNO while being absolutely oblivious to the game's rules. My classmate, Ana, and I found ourselves fixating on the smallest details such as how the playing cards were laid out



Provided by Sabhya Arora

on the desk and which instructions on the card box to show in-frame, because subtle visual cues like these combine to form a narrative.

That is a meaning-making process that takes place not only in film but also in commercials and social media content today. Learning to recognise and read these cues, to build on Kenney's point, deepens our understanding of digital content. This not only helps us enjoy it more, but also makes us less susceptible to consumerist sales tactics that are often slipped into the content we watch on a daily basis.

The importance of digital literacy is part of why Kenney has been vying for more substantial film education at UBCO. Still, despite having less resources than the Vancouver campus and some other universities, the Okanagan campus is a unique environment for learning film production.

Kenney: Film and television is taking off in the Okanagan and productions are desperate for film crews and personnel of all sorts. This is a good time to get involved. Studying in the city where you want to actually work is a good idea, so it would be advantageous for a student to study here and begin to build connections with the local industry.

Chan: Yes, I can see that. The Okanagan has gradually established a local film industry in places like Enderby, Vernon, and here in Kelowna. The Okanagan Society of Independent Filmmaking has been hosting the annual Okanagan Screen Awards for three years; the Kelowna International Film Festival is also debuting later this year². Considering the local film scene, what advantage is there to taking a Film course at UBCO?

Kenney: I have worked in film and television in Vancouver and I know there is a lot going on there, but there is also a lot of competition and distractions. UBCO is more intimate and can offer more attention to students in terms of designing experiences that are aligned with their interests. Having said all this, it's always up to the individual student to build their opportunities, no matter where they study. No program is going to "get you that job."

Chan: Right. A film program will not magically secure a career in the industry, and one could more or less say the same for any line of work. If not by majoring in film, what other ways might our students gain the necessary skillset to get professionally involved in film production?

Kenney: First, there are other courses at UBCO related to filmmaking, such as the following:

Workshop in Creative Writing: Screenwriting (CRWR 250)
Intro to Digital Media I (VISA 106)
Intro to Digital Media II (VISA 108)
Studies in Photography (VISA 110)
Sound Art (VISA 206)
Photography I (VISA 244)
Photography II (VISA 256)
2D Animation (VISA 266)
Strategies in Digital Art: Visual Communication

(VISA 268)
Strategies in Digital Art: Virtual Worlds (VISA 269)

Advanced Practice in Photography (VISA 362)
Advanced Practice in Media Arts (VISA 382)
Reading Screens (CULT 210/ENGL 215)
Cultural Industries (CULT 215)
Visual Anthropology and New Media (ANTH 252)
English-Canadian Screen Culture (CULT 305)
Studies in Cinema (FREN 327)
Digital Media and History: Documentary Filmmaking for Scholars and Activists (HIST 497)

Chan: Thank you for that list! I am sure our students will find it very helpful. What about resources outside of UBCO?

Kenney: Students need only do a google search for film training opportunities in the Okanagan and look at the Okanagan Film Commission website for information as well.

The opportunities are out there, but students need to take initiative to find them. The film industry is highly competitive and standards are high. Initiative and professionalism are very important qualities to have; production costs are high and people don't want to take risks on personnel. In a way, the first hurdle to becoming involved is simply having the initiative to figure out how to become involved.

There are also many different kinds of engagement: post-production, locations, set decorating, props, gaming, computational arts... you name it. Students must be prepared to "pay their dues." I always suggest that students make their own films, volunteer on projects, meet other emerging filmmakers, go to festivals, and get involved in any way they can. No amount of schooling is a substitute for experience. When I started out, there were only a few ways to get your independent film shot, edited, or seen. These days, production, post production and distribution has become so accessible that anybody can reach their audience if they work at it.

Chan: Finally, to wrap up this interview, what do you enjoy most about teaching film?

Kenney: I love teaching Film. Teaching Film courses puts students in direct conversations with the artists they love and helps them find their voices as artists themselves.

I am not teaching students for the existing film/TV/online world, but rather for the film/TV/online world I perhaps can't imagine yet. I believe the next generation of artists (students) will move these art forms forward. That requires imagination, creativity, and listening to emerging aesthetics, perspectives and ideas.

Teaching film is always a process of reciprocal learning. It is difficult to keep up with such a quickly evolving form, and I often find my students are on the pulse of something I hadn't considered. I know I have a lot to teach them, but they also keep me on my toes. That's fun.

Kenney's final comments emphasise the value of teaching film. It fosters creativity and imagination, qualities that are becoming increasingly precious as we learn to co-exist with generative AI technologies. If we hope to keep seeing new and interesting stories on screen, not formulaic variations of the same one, then the ability to recognise narrative techniques and to also develop your own is crucial. Additionally, the collaboration and exchange of ideas involved in filmmaking is exciting for both the students and the instructor.

Having a dedicated program for film, more equipment, and experienced instructors would make the aforementioned learning experience more accessible and straightforward for students. Hence, the potential for a film stream in UBCO's Bachelor of Media Studies program is promising, but even now, one can take the initiative to learn to read screens and make movies here in the Okanagan.

Filmmaking is such a hands-on activity and the industry is so reliant on building connections that access to film schooling, while helpful, is not the end-all-be-all for aspiring filmmakers. The most important step, like Kenney says, is to make something. Remain creative, share your projects with the communities around you, and surely, one day your name will appear as the credits roll for a piece of work you were proud to bring to life.

1. Okanagan Society of Independent Filmmaking. (2025). Okanagan Screen Awards. <https://www.osif.org/awards>
2. White, C. (2025, June 2). New Kelowna International Film Festival to debut next year. Castanet. <https://www.castanet.net/news/Kelowna/553894/New-Kelowna-International-Film-Festival-to-debut-next-year>

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Find the Boyfriend: The Art of the Soft Launch

BY JUHI SARVAIYA

Forget pickleball. Forget intramurals. Who would have thought that our generation's real competitive sport would be *spotting the soft launch*?

The term "soft launch" refers to the process of releasing a product or service to a limited audience first, to test the market, gather feedback, and make adjustments before the full-scale launch.

But today, a soft launch means something else. It means subtly hinting on social media that you are seeing someone new — showing just enough for people to assume you are dating while keeping the details intentionally vague.

If you have ever played "Where's Waldo", you are already trained for modern dating! Today's version is "where's the boyfriend?" and the clues are always the same: hand on a knee, a mirror selfie "accidentally" hiding a face, two cups of coffee, hand holding, a blurry silhouette.

In recent times, there has been an explosion of labels and terms for every corner of dating, from situationships to love-bombing to breadcrumbing. At this point, if you are not knee-deep in the dating pool, chronically online, or both, you might as well make a glossary and keep it in your back pocket to keep track.

This overload of terms does not just sit on our tongues for fun, they shape how people interpret love, relationships, and boundaries. What counts as "normal", what is "too much", what qualifies as a red flag, what is an "ick" — the constant over-analysis takes the enjoyment out of dating and becomes overwhelming. Soft launching is just one of



Illustration by Iso Maaud Rodriguez

the newest and weirdly powerful pieces of this already chaotic puzzle.

But why has soft-launching become such a big deal? Why does curating your relationship online feel like a tiny PR job — avoiding labels, delaying tags, keeping things vague and mysterious to "protect the vibe"?

It is not that some are just private people. It is that posting feels high stakes, especially in universities where everyone shares mutuals and one story can turn into campus lore by lunch.

There may be valid reasons for the phenomenon. Sometimes it is privacy. Sometimes it is superstition, where you do not want to jinx it. Sometimes it is defensive, so if it ends, you do not have to delete evidence

like it is a crime scene. Sometimes it is just part of the appeal of the mysterious image you want to curate of yourself.

Some students I spoke to described soft launching like a safety feature, like something you do until you know it is real. Others said it is a way to avoid turning your relationship into online content. A few admitted to enjoying the mystery and curiosity — dropping just enough to make friends and followers spiral over this secret somebody, while they sit back and let the speculation do the rest. Almost like the "who could that be?" frenzy makes it all the more exciting.

Relationship visibility has become a reputational decision now.

Yet often these posting norms do

not just live on Instagram; they seep into real trust dynamics. To one person, soft launching is a healthy boundary. To the other, it can feel like being carefully edited out. That is where it stops being an aesthetic choice and starts becoming an actual relationship issue. Now you are not just dating, you are negotiating how visible you are allowed to be.

Relationships have always had public and private parts. People have always struggled with what to share and what to keep to themselves. Social media just cranks up the amount of attention we give it to an absurd volume.

Now, you are not telling a few friends over dinner anymore; you are handing out clues to hundreds of people on the internet, essentially inviting them to witness and to build a version of your relationship from whatever you have posted. Once the audience is watching, their reactions — likes, comments, or lack thereof — start messing with your own head and can change the way you think about your own happiness.

Perhaps the problem with soft-launching is how much meaning we attach to it. The line between who we are and who we perform as online blurs, until even the most natural and special moments start to feel like content. There is a pressure to match one's social media identity, and life feels incomplete unless everything is recorded and shared.

No wonder people overthink. Underneath it all, we are not afraid of fame, we are afraid of how we are being perceived. The boyfriend, meanwhile, remains at large.

Banter: The Flirtation Equation

BY JUHI SARVAIYA

The most convincing love story lies not in grand gestures and tropes, but in conversations. The way two characters talk to each other, the words, the rhythm, the beats; that is what makes up such an endearing aspect of romance: banter. That is where the chemistry resides — be it in books, movies, TV, or real life.

At its core, banter is playful, teasing, and quick-witted conversation. It is what has us giggling like children or smirking like villains as we see it unfold. It is magnetic.

When written well, banter creates a slow-burning tension, reveals personality without a long backstory, and slips subtext into the simplest lines. Most importantly, it makes characters feel like real people. When you have that, the romance stops feeling like a plot point and starts feeling like something you are watching happen in real time.

Jesse and Celine in *Before Sunrise* (1995), Harry and Sally in *When Harry Met Sally* (1989), Aisha and Sid in *Wake Up Sid* (2009) — it is the same kind of magic every time. Why did Season Two of *Bridgerton* connect with so many people? Everyone was hooked to their screens watching Anthony and Kate face off — the underlying tension, crackling dialogues, soft music, all creating the delicious back-and-forth that is still discussed today. But why does banter work so well? Banter is really just compatibility in motion — the timing, confidence, inside jokes, and emotional safety, all wrapped into a couple lines. After soaking up so many stories, both on paper and screen, I started noticing certain ingredients that made the exchange so ridicu-

lously enjoyable:

1. Timing: the reply comes fast, but not desperate
2. Specificity: not cookie-cutter flirting, but something oddly precise or observational
3. Callbacks: remembering what the other person said three lines ago and weaponizing it in a fun, teasing manner
4. Escalation (my favorite): each line raises the stakes, even if it is just playful competition about who is winning

A good back-and-forth can feel intimate, like you are getting a subtle peek behind the curtain. It is not only about the jokes, but also about recognizing if there is a connection, if you both are able to get each other's references, rhythms, thoughts, and humor.

On page, banter works because it is dialogue with subtext. The characters are not

only saying what they mean, but they are circling the thing they will not admit out loud. Writers use that anticipation and dial it up more with tiny tools: interruptions, half-finished sentences, described body language, or lines that sound conversational but carry weight. As a reader, you find your eyes starting to move faster, skimming those short lines like you are watching a rally in badminton, tracking the back-and-forth as it speeds up.

However, creating banter on-screen requires a slightly different three-part strategy of its own: non-diegetic music, pacing, and of course, the performance itself. It hits even harder because the dialogue is not working alone. Music does a lot of heavy lifting because the score can turn a line from silly to romantic in half a second or signal how one person in the equation is receiving it. Then there

is pacing: quick cuts and tight reaction shots capture nervous, twinkling eyes and emerging smiles.

Unlike books, films, and TV, let us hear the texture of the banter, pulling us into what the banter is supposed to *feel* like. Sometimes, the real spark is in what they do, not say, and the camera knows exactly where to look, catching every bit of it.

Great banter does more than just fill the space between characters; it gives each person a distinct voice. One has that bone-dry wit, the other, pure drama. Someone hides behind jokes, and the other pokes holes in the act. Since it is all written, every line earns its place. That is where the "spark" comes from, the sense that the conversation is alive and you are right there inside it. When banter is so convincing that it feels effortless, it often makes you feel like you are eavesdropping on a conversation you should not be hearing.

When thinking about real life, timing is everything. But modern communication is not built for that, especially since much of our interactions happen on text or through meta-reactions. In real life, people carry baggage — a fear of looking stupid, not wanting to be misread, or off as "cringe." So, a lot of us either overdo or underdo the performing. Which is ironic, because banter is supposed to feel natural. Maybe that is why banter hits so hard when it does work. It pulls you in, makes chemistry feel alive, and reminds you what it looks like when two people meet each other on the same level.



Illustration by Iso Maaud Rodriguez

A Guide to not Being Hypnotized by Brain Scan Pictures

BY CONNOR BRAKE



Provided by Sabhya Arora

Although this article might have nothing to do with neuroscience or brain scans, by inserting a photo of one, it will immediately seem more scientific to readers. We are easily swayed by generic phrases like “brain scans have shown” or “because of the [brain region] brain circuitry involved in [cognitive task].” Why are we so quick to believe a statement when it contains some extra scientific words or a brain scan image?

Some scientists have hypothesized we often find neuroscience information alluring because we see neuroscience as a definitive science.¹ Thus, by adding relevant or even semi-relevant scientific jargon to a sentence, a writer creates a stronger marker of a good explanation regardless of its actual accuracy. This means that people may simply accept any explanation containing neuroscientific information, even in cases when that information is irrelevant to the explanation itself.

A groundbreaking study conducted in 2008 further analyzed this observation. There were a total of 81 participants in the study (42 women, 37 men, and 3 unreported) with an average age of 20.1 years. Randomly, 40 subjects were assigned explanations without added neuroscience information and 41 participants were assigned explanations with additional information. All of the explanations handed out related to “the curse of knowledge.”

The results of the study were startlingly consistent. When an explanation was good, the rating given was consistently rated high, as expected. Participants who read the bad explanations without added neuroscience jargon could easily spot the flawed arguments. However, when the same explanations contained the irrelevant jargon participants rated the explanations as significantly more satis-

1. Weisberg, D. S., Keil, F. C., Goodstein, J., Rawson, E., & Gray, J. R. (2008). The seductive allure of neuroscience explanations. *Journal of Cognitive Neuroscience*, 20(3), 470–477. <https://doi.org/10.1162/jocn.2008.20040>

fy than the plain versions. Essentially, the added information prevented people from seeing the problems in the presented explanations.^{1,2}

Why are we so susceptible? One theory is the “Hierarchy of the Sciences.” In our cultural psyche we tend to view some sciences as more objective than others; the plausible order from least to most objective being social science, psychology, neuroscience, biology, chemistry, and physics.

By framing a topic or idea in terms of neuroscience, a writer is essentially trying to move their argument up that hierarchy. If someone can seemingly point out a physical wire of our brain’s hardware, we assume that they must have found the ultimate cause, even if they are describing the same point with more

2. Alsharif, A. H., & Mohd Isa, S. (2024). Revolutionizing consumer insights: The impact of fmri in Neuromarketing Research. *Future Business Journal*, 10(1). <https://doi.org/10.1186/s43093-024-00371-z>

complicated language.

Ultimately, this phenomenon is not just a purely academic finding: it has had real-world consequences. For instance, within the sector of marketing exists “neuro-marketing”, in which firms charge prices to show companies which parts of a consumer’s brain lights up in response to advertisements.² Using these findings, firms believe that certain marketing actions can increase the perceived pleasantness of a product, despite a vast lack of neuromarketing experts in this sector. Because of this, it is not a far reaching conclusion to view the sector of neuromarketing not only as a practice that takes advantage of consumer biology, but also a sector that may not be reaching genuine conclusions.

Similarly, another study from Har-

3. The selective allure of neuroscience and its implications for the courtroom. *The Center for Law, Brain & Behavior*. (2014, November 26). <https://clbb.mgh.harvard.edu/the-selective-allure-of-neuroscience-and-its-implications-for-the-courtroom/>

vard investigated the effects of neuroscience belief in the courtroom.³ The study found that individuals often evaluated the scientific validity of neuroscientific findings based primarily on their preexisting beliefs. However, further studies are needed in this area of research as highly polarizing beliefs such as the death penalty or abortion have not been examined with enough validity.

So how do we protect ourselves from being hypnotized by neuroscience jargon? The key is to apply some simple logic to any of these claims.⁴ First, look for an article that explains a concept from a variety of sciences and scientific perspectives. Second, check for redundancy in an explanation. For instance, if an explanation describes how a musician’s brain is different from our own, neuroimaging is not necessary to prove that expectation. Third, look for articles that do not have circularity. Basically, check that the article is not just restating a finding using more complicated terms.

For more complex research papers or studies, a similar process can be applied. Determining if the study is peer-reviewed helps ensure claims are supported by the correct authority. Verifying that the findings have been replicated also helps determine the authenticity of an article.

Ultimately, we must remember that we are drawn to certain sciences because we bias them as a more valid science than another. However, by simply questioning if the article makes sense, we can determine if it is actually trying to teach us an idea or just sell us a product. By doing so, we do not just protect ourselves from believing lies, we become better critical thinkers.

4. Weisberg, D. S., Taylor, J. C. V., & Hopkins, E. J. (2015). Deconstructing the seductive allure of neuroscience explanations. *Judgment and Decision Making*, 10(5), 429–441. [doi:10.1017/S193029750000557X](https://doi.org/10.1017/S193029750000557X)

Advertising, Abortion, and Autonomy in Kelowna

BY CHARLOTTE TAPPIN

In December of 2025, prior to making my escape home for the holidays, I found myself on the bus one day after a final exam. Typically, the advertisements on public transit are easy to dismiss and I can go about my day without paying them any attention. However, one in particular caught my eye. Looming above my head was a picture of a woman’s pregnant belly, and the outline of a child’s foot can be seen pressing outwards. The description of the picture verified that it was a “digitally altered image.” The bold text on the advertisement read:

“The unborn are not “potential human beings,” they are human beings with great potential.”

Somehow, this advertisement had crawled its way up from a billboard in the Bible Belt of the USA, out of the Handmaid’s Tale, or off your weird aunt’s Facebook page to a bus in Kelowna.

On the bottom of this advertisement from the Kelowna Right to Life Society, it states: “this is a paid advertisement. The views expressed are not necessarily the view of BC Transit or the City of Kelowna.” It seems that the BC Transit association and the City of Kelowna are attempting to remain impartial to the anti-choice sentiments represented in the advertisement, but the choice to allow it on bus routes reflect they are not committed to their mission of serving the public.

In the BC Transit code of conduct, they state that “[they] are committed to fostering equality and a culture that is free from discrimination.”¹ However, in a dispute that occurred in December 2025, anti-abortion

1. BC Transit. “Code of Conduct.” Kelowna, 2025. www.bctransit.com/kelowna/. Strachan, Brady. “Anti-Abortion Billboards in West Kelow-

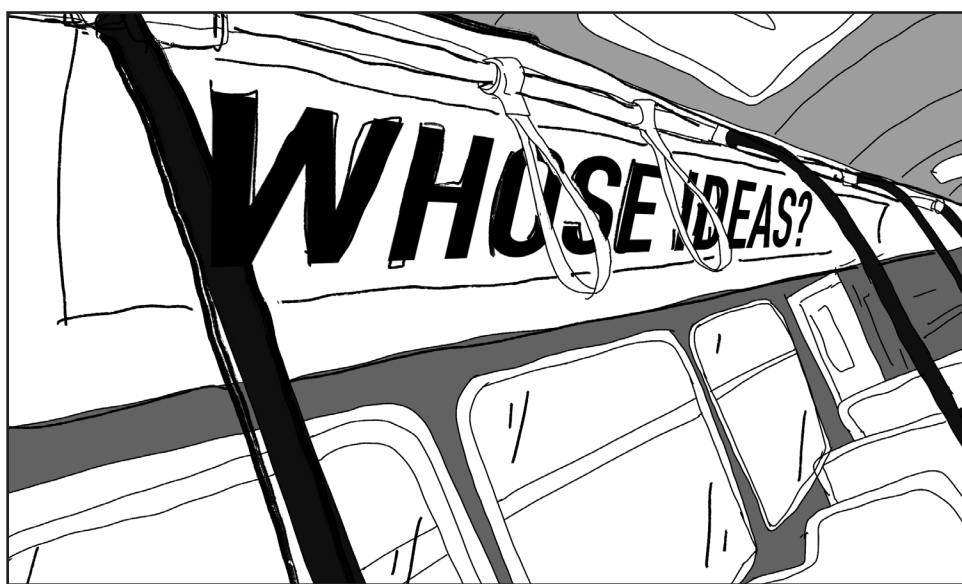


Illustration by Iso Maaud Rodriguez

billboards in Kelowna were under harsh legal scrutiny for potentially violating discrimination clauses in the B.C. Human Rights Code.²

In 2025, UBC Okanagan student and pro-choice advocate Sophie Harms raised funds to have a pro-choice billboard put up by the same billboard company that was presenting the anti-choice messaging. However, Harms’ request was rejected. This refusal was based on supposed policy against controversial topics such as abortion, despite the company’s history with displaying anti-abortion rhetoric.

Soon after, Harms connected with legal counsel through the B.C. Humanist Association; letters were then penned to the billboard companies to challenge their decision. The lawyers involved cited protections which

na, B.C., to Come down after Pro-Choice Advocate’s Push.” *CBC*, 10 Dec. 2025. www.cbc.ca/news/canada/british-columbia/west-kelowna-billboard-company-ends-abortion-ads-9.7005552.

prohibits discrimination based on sex — which includes pregnancy related health care — from the B.C. Human Rights Code.

Response to this from the billboard companies was a decision to change their policy related to rhetoric on abortion entirely, and they stated they would remove all anti-abortion billboards at the end of their respective contracts. Although this meant Harms’ messaging focusing on pro-choice could not be presented, the change was still accepted as a win.

Marlon Bartram, director of the Kelowna Right to Life Society, was not entirely surprised by this result and indicated that the group would “try other means, social media, radio, television, public demonstrations”³

3. Femia, Victoria. “Anti-Abortion Billboards in West Kelowna, B.C. To Be Taken Down.” *Global News*, 11 Dec. 2025. globalnews.ca/news/11572794/anti-abor-

to get their message through. Returning to the advertisements on the buses, the Kelowna Right to Life Society’s next target is university and college students in Kelowna.

In a newsletter published by the Kelowna Right to Life Society from October 2025, they state their advertisement “is in thirty buses that run seven days per week in the Kelowna area, including the busy routes to UBCO and Okanagan College.”⁴ They also later compare these advertisements on the Kelowna buses to their billboards, which have been a major point of contention in conversations surrounding abortion within the Kelowna area.

Rates of abortion are typically highest in 18-25 year olds, and the Kelowna Right to Life Society is placing their harmful messaging in a place where they will do the most damage. This messaging will scare viewers away from their own bodily autonomy, right to choose, and their own potential as human beings. Students face enough stressors with academic pressures, financial issues, and various other forces that implicate their lives. Spreading ideas that support stripping people of their rights over their own body is something that a society such as Canada should be far beyond.

Advocating for the restriction of an individual’s medical autonomy invades both privacy and freedom, and is certainly not something that a tasteless advertisement on public transit should be preaching. Instead of degrading people for putting their potential first, we should be supporting the choices of individuals that are made in their own best interest.

tion-billboards-west-kelowna-bc/. Accessed 21 Jan. 2026. 4. Kelowna Right to Life Society. *Kelowna Right to Life Society*, 23 Oct. 2025. www.prolifekelowna.ca/guides.

All That Glitters... Is Gay!

BY WENDELL ZYLSTRA

Modern discourse surrounding queer representation in media looks more at the specifics of what makes good representations as opposed to harmful ones. One of the conversations stemming from this is whether or not cis-het (cisgender and heterosexual) actors should play queer characters, which is a question that can not necessarily be answered with a yes or no.

Films like *Blue is the Warmest Color* and *Brokeback Mountain* feature gay or lesbian protagonists played by straight actors. Both of these films received massive critical acclaim and they continue to be some of the most recognizable queer films today. Both of these pieces of media are important parts of queer history and bring up discussions of queer issues in mainstream cis-het spaces.

However, *Brokeback Mountain* is the story of two stereotypically attractive hypermasculine white men occasionally beating the snot out of each other that ends in a gut-wrenching tragedy. *Blue is the Warmest Color* ends with one of the two stereotypically attractive white female leads leaving the other for a man. It is hard to deny the historical importance of these pieces of media, but it is also important to consider the impressions they leave on the queer people who witness them. The queer experience can be full of prejudice and hate, but those experiences are not all there are for queer people.

The tragedy in many of the final moments of queer films comes from both a long history of censorship and a need to stir empathy in the hearts of misguided cis-het people. Films, for a long time, were not restricted by censorship laws. In the West (circa late 1920s), churches began to stir a moral panic in the pub-



Illustration by Iso Maanad Rodriguez

lic about films containing sacrilegious content, which led to the creation of several production codes. The most famous code was the 'Hays Code,' which was later enforced by American governments and forbade 'obscene' things such as interracial couples, dissension towards the Catholic church, homosexuality, and couples kissing without having at least one foot on the floor (the cliché of the girl popping her foot up as she kisses a love interest is a cheeky nod to this). The code was later repealed but it took a while before queer people re-entered mainstream cinema.

When they did, many films gained attention for highlighting tragedies, often giving bigoted cis-het people empathy for queer people of the time. I have personally seen cases where homophobic and transphobic people weep at scenes of queer pain or even just coming out scenes simply because they are so well-acted. These progressions of opinion help move forward queer rights movements,

but can also affect the ways queer people view themselves.

Being trans puts you in a precarious spot in society in general, but certainly it is no help to constantly see depictions of people like you whose lives end in tragedy. The film *Boys Don't Cry*, based on the real life story of Brandon Teena, received instant critical acclaim upon release for the performance of Hilary Swank. While the film is important, it is also horrific and a transgender viewer without any support may believe that these tragedies are all that their future holds.

While cis-het actors receive numerous awards for their portrayals of real queer people, queer people remain marginalized. The experience of being a marginalized person can be researched, but a cis-het actor and film crew will never actually experience life as a queer person.

Looking at the more contemporary example of a little show called *Heated Rival-*

ry, we can see how the representation of queer people has changed.

Heated Rivalry is by no means perfect representation. Many have raised questions about the excessive portrayal of sex, the emphasis on masculinity, the use of only stereotypically attractive actors, and the sidelining of female characters in the show. But compared to a film like *Brokeback Mountain*, *Heated Rivalry* shows remarkable tenderness, care, and a conclusion containing a sweet admission of love and a coming out scene that does not end in total tragedy.

Questions about the two lead actors' sexualities have surfaced frequently in online discussion. Fuelled by the complex history of the representation of queer people, many press the actors to share their identities. However, these questions quickly become invasive and pose a dangerous ultimatum to two young actors: 'come out to us or face serious backlash'. Representation is complicated, but real people should never be forced to come out to prove their legitimacy as queer people.

Again, there is no answer to the question of whether or not cis-het actors should play queer characters. There are experiences queer people understand that no amount of research will allow cis-het people to know, but each piece of media is different. Any representation of queer, and especially trans people, remains important to furthering societal opinions, but media is only one piece of the puzzle. The biggest hope I have for queer representation is that it can help a queer person see that there are things beyond hurt and, most importantly, that it can help everyone to see that the rights and social equality of queer people are worth fighting for.

Hyaluronic Acid is Peace, Wrinkles are Slavery, Ignorance is Strength

BY WENDELL ZYLSTRA

Advertising may be the most annoying and unremarkable part of our day. Annoying for endlessly cushioning all the things we try to relax and dissociate with — TV shows, movies, social media, even magazines and ebooks. Their reputation for being the 'stuff before the stuff you actually want' allows them to fly under our conscious analysis in order to pivot directly into our subconscious minds. *They Live* conspiracy glasses aside, ads and their prevalence in the media so many of us consume directly shape the way we think about culture.

In October of last year, skincare brand The Ordinary launched an ad campaign across social media and television. The video ad promoted a page on their website with a graphic called the 'periodic fable'.¹ The graphic poked fun at 'beauty myths' and the pseudoscientific language used in trendy beauty products promoted by influencers and other advertising methods. The campaign, as with most ad campaigns, was just another string of videos and images that faded into obscurity as newer ones came down the tube. However, this campaign in particular caught my eye for one reason.

The commercial follows a group of people each representing a beauty myth (such as poreless or anti-aging), chanting in front of a projector screen until it is hijacked by The Ordinary and reveals the periodic fable. The ad follows in a long line of ads referencing the famous '2-minute-hate' scene in the film version of *1984*, or perhaps referencing Apple's own ad reference to the film.²

We can see how the brand wishes to appear to viewers here: as a disrupting force

or a light in the shadow of misinformation. It presents these grotesque figures with stretched skin and strange, alienlike garments. The ad pokes fun at Kardashian level beauty influencers in this way, revealing something about who they are pitching themselves to.

Even simply in the name, The Ordinary attempted to appeal to those who think of themselves as part of the societal norm. This 'ordinary' window is one women specifically are often tasked with fitting into. To not be too 'crazy' about themselves, like the Kardashians, but also to 'take care' of themselves and look pretty in a way that others can consume. The 'elements' on the periodic fable can each be highlighted for a little informational blurb. The blurb for the 'poreless' element notes that "your skincare can't erase pores, but facts can be blurred." The implication of the word *facts* implies that pores are something nastily un-

avoidable, though every person on the planet has them (talk about *natural*).

To give credit where due, the brand is one of the only popular in the beauty influencer sphere that prioritizes dermatology research to formulate their products. Skin care can be really helpful for those with sensitive skin or dermatological conditions. Skin care routines can also be a nice break from dealing with the stresses of day-to-day life. Some people work all day to care for others and a soothing cleanser may be just what they need to help focus on themselves momentarily. I cannot deny the many people in my life who get a lot out of their skin care routines, often using products from The Ordinary.

However, The Ordinary is, at heart, a brand that wants to advertise and sell products to the largest number of people possible, with its main channel of doing so being advertising.



Illustration by Iso Maanad Rodriguez

They may have better business practices, but a large amount of their sales come from people who scroll through endless videos of influencers with perfect skin putting muck on their faces. Those same people who judge others for not looking a certain way.

These videos and advertising may appear to be simply annoying or mindless pieces of media in a sea of many others, but we can see that the true intentions of these advertisers is only to get you to watch the video or buy the muck. To cast the biggest net that wrangles the most consumers, advertisers must play into social norms and perceived popular culture. These norms, even when so cheekily acknowledged, still reinforce harmful ideas about people. In this case, they are beauty standards which have caused deep insecurities in those that view this media.

There are few people in my life who have not felt at some point deeply insecure about themselves and their place in society. I would argue there are probably few people in general who have never felt that way. Advertising does not carry the blame for all of this, but the passive use of normality only reinforces these insecurities for the sake of profit. Critical engagement with these campaigns and such methods of advertising only helps to remove yourself and those around you from the expectations of being 'ordinary'.

1. The Periodic Fable. (n.d.). The Periodic Fable: A Scientific Table with Zero Science. The Ordinary. Accessed February 5, 2026. <https://theordinary.com/en-us/the-periodic-fable.html#/table>.

2. Retro Recipes x Commodore. (2023, February 12). 4K Restoration: 1984 Super Bowl APPLE MACINTOSH Ad by Ridley Scott [Video]. YouTube. Accessed February 5, 2026. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ErwS24cBZPc>.

Populism, Progressives, and the Democratic

BY AIDEN MALCOLM

If Democrats do not take up a populist strategy, they will continue losing to those on the right who do. Despite positioning themselves as the left-wing choice, they have continued to withhold support for policies that help working class citizens, social programs like public transportation, and popular progressive candidates like Bernie Sanders and Zohran Mamdani. While this was not a problem in the static political environment that establishment Democrats and Republicans upheld for the last century, the rise of candidates who run on populist platforms within the GOP has presented a significant problem for the establishment Democrats.

This was first seen in the 2016 Presidential Election, and to a shocking degree. The two candidates — the GOP's Donald Trump and the Democrats' Hillary Clinton — represented opposite ends of the political spectrum, and not just one drawn by party lines. Trump truly was a bold but necessary choice for the GOP after the disastrous 2005-2009 term of George Bush, and the loss of the two subsequent elections to the underdog Barack Obama.

Unlike the past two Republican presidents, Trump had little political background, instead relying on his reputation as a businessman for influence. In contrast, Hillary Clinton was heavily connected to the Democratic political establishment, through her husband Bill Clinton, and her previous political occupation as senator.

However, Clinton seemed to embody the Democratic establishment, a direct result of the previous Obama administration. In Obama's 2008 campaign, he cashed in on the optimism and hope for systemic change that was in the air after the housing bubble popped. This farce was quickly seen through by many leftists in the party. In both of his terms, Obama deported record amounts of immigrants, increased drone strikes to extreme numbers while downplaying civilian casualties, and failed to halt military involvement in Afghanistan.^{1,2} This left many of his more politically conscious voters feeling disillusioned, both with Obama and the Democratic establishment he had come to represent.

Trump capitalized off this distrust. He ran against the Democrats intelligently, emphasizing his differences, lack of political connections, and capacity for change. The Democrats were unprepared, and despite decisive cultural dominance and an incumbent status, narrowly lost the election.

The Democrats had a candidate who would have been a much more effective response but chose not to nominate him despite a strong voting record: Bernie Sanders. Unlike Clinton, Sanders was a populist candidate seeking reforms to a variety of issues, including healthcare, minimum wage, corporate bailouts, tax rates, and other quintessentially progressive policies.

Sanders had a solid political record as a Vermont Senator, a position he has held since 2007. While not as strong in urban centers, he polled much better than Clinton in rural white communities,

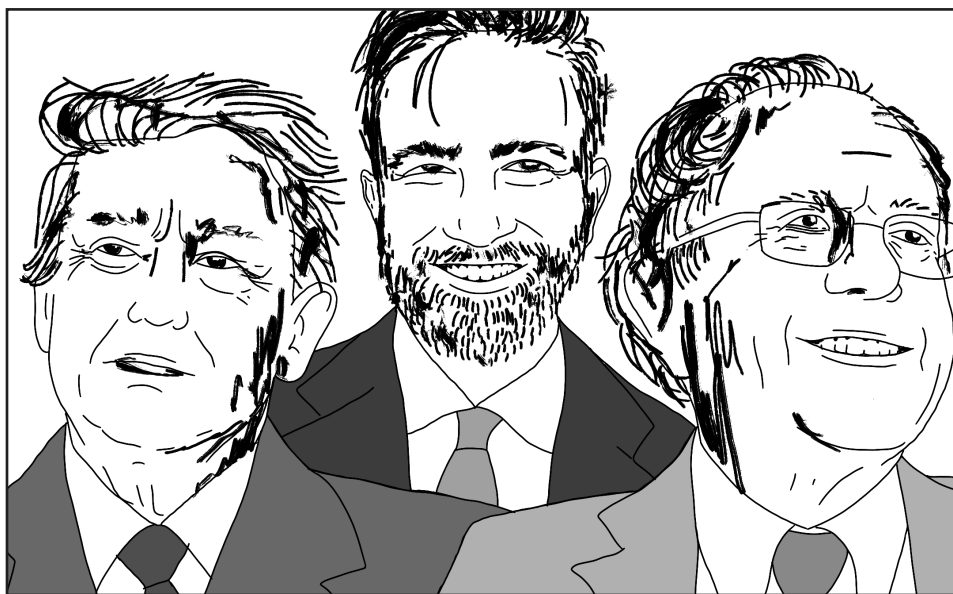


Illustration by Iso Maaud Rodriguez

a stronghold for Trump.³ Sanders was the best of both worlds: progressive enough to challenge Trump's position as "change" candidate, but with enough of a political resume to maintain longstanding and important Democrat voting blocs. However, his rhetoric was unpopular with establishment Democrats, and he lost the nomination.

Fast forward to 2020, when after a rather ineffective four years in office and two impeachments, COVID-19 was quickly becoming a major force with political ramifications. While many former Trump voters spoke out against him after seeing his style of governance, the real reason incumbents lost was the massive change that the pandemic forced on everyone. After two years of self-isolation, complicated disease control policies, and vaccine misinformation, people craved stability. Understanding this, it's clear why Trump was going to lose.

Obama's former Vice President Joe Biden was a clear choice for the Democrats. Biden represented everything Trump was not: stable and clearheaded with a long political history. Not only this, but both his age, gender, and race made him an even more attractive candidate for former Trump voters. In essence, he occupied the role of "America's Grandfather."

Another four years later and this very fact was used against him. Biden's term was moderately successful, if relatively uneventful. Trump used this to his advantage in the 2024 elections, occupying a familiar role. Once again, he was the "change" candidate in contrast with the establishment Democrat Party. While Biden had a solid record as president, he typified the Democratic Party's aging establishment, having been a senator from 1973-2009 as well as Vice President for both of Obama's terms.

While this was symbolically important for many progressives, more important was Biden's physical age. Videos of him seeming frail, stumbling over his words, and poor debate performances all went viral. Like his 2016 campaign, Trump let his opponent make mistakes and then applied great pressure to those weak points.

This was used to such a devastating extent that Biden pulled out of the race on July 21, 2024, after a disastrous debate performance that led to many sitting Dem-

ocrats to call for his withdrawal. Biden left only five months for his vice-president, Kamala Harris, to campaign for election. Trump, after seemingly vanquishing the incumbent, now faced a new threat. Harris was 18 years his junior, a person of colour, a woman, and had only a short political career before becoming vice president.

While at face value Harris seemed like a far-left-winger's dream, she was anything but. Before becoming a politician, she was California's Attorney General, a position which many on the far left held great contempt for. While she was publicly in favour of *Roe v. Wade*, several of her other positions seemed vaguely establishment Republican: throughout her campaign she was pro-fracking, pro-war, anti-immigration, and generally pro-Israel.

Embodying this was the endorsement of the Harris campaign by Dick and Liz Cheney. Dick Cheney was George W. Bush's Vice President from 2001-2009, and an important player behind the widespread imperialism that impacted the Middle East during those years. He commanded an unprecedented level of power in the administration, and while largely unknown at the time, many now consider him the architect of the many wars in the Middle East. So, while his endorsement might have been welcome from some disaffected Republicans, it was a clear red flag for many progressives.

Alongside Republicans like the Cheneys, the Democrats ran a very expensive and short campaign for Harris. Celebrity endorsements from the likes of Taylor Swift, Beyonce, Lady Gaga, and Arnold Schwarzenegger abounded. Massive, star-studded campaign rallies became the norm. All told, the Democrats spent 1.5 billion in just 15 weeks.⁴

Despite their flashy endorsement, Republican appeals, and incumbent status, the Democrats lost, and in a glorious fashion. Not only did Trump win the house, as he did in 2016, but the popular vote as well, beating Harris by seven million votes.

Strikingly, the Democrats did not only lose in demographics they usually would, like among white male older voters, but in both Black and Latino demographics as well. More importantly, the Democrats lost the under-30 demographic in key states, a long-time staple for their party.⁵

After the monumental 2024 loss,

it may seem clear that the Democratic establishment needed a change to remain a viable party. However, despite what seemed like an obvious solution, many within the party did not agree. Instead, they pointed at would-be Democrats for the loss, decrying them as racist and sexist for not voting for Harris. They blamed other leftists for not endorsing a campaign that went against their fundamental values, one that seemed to embody the establishment that had long forsaken them.

In October 2024 Zohran Mamdani announced his candidacy in the mayoral race for New York City. While a member of both the Democratic Socialists of America and the Democratic Party, Mamdani chose to seek candidacy with the Dems. Unlike typical Democratic establishment candidates he was firmly a populist candidate. His campaign promises included universal childcare, city owned grocery stores, and a \$30 minimum wage, all of which differ starkly from the maintenance of established norms which typified party politics for generations.⁶

During the Democratic primaries many establishment Democrats were staunchly against Mamdani. Initially, the Democratic party backed the deeply unpopular incumbent mayor Eric Adams. This unpopularity, especially concentrated in groups situated to the left of the Democratic Party and in concert with New York's 2021 switch to ranked choice voting, led to a rapid swing in election results.

After Adams lost the Democratic primary, he ran as an independent in the mayoral race and garnered little of the vote. Mamdani's Republican opponent Curtis Silwa ran unopposed, but was not seen as a threat, dually because he is not taken seriously by many, and because Republicans do not represent the same power they hold nationwide within northern urban centers like New York.

Disrupting this, and giving Mamdani a formidable opponent, was disgraced former New York Governor Andrew Cuomo. Cuomo received millions from New York's wealthiest, including former Republican mayor and billionaire Michael Bloomberg. Despite this, Mamdani won the mayoral election and was sworn in on January 1.

If the left learns lessons, his victory should mark a shift away from the moderate and indecisive politics that are hallmarks of the Democratic establishment for the past two decades. For many people, candidates like Mamdani represent hope in what they see as a failing electoral decision. He is a candidate that people can be proud of and stand behind, not just another least-bad politician in what seems to be a race to the bottom.

This is all to say that the democrats must become populists if they wish to remain relevant in electoral races across the U.S.. While populism has become somewhat of a dirty word among leftist circles, used in conjunction with words like fascism to describe the Trump administration. Instead, Democrats need to see it for what it truly is, a winning political and a necessity for the future.

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2. TRAC at Work. (n.d.). Retrieved January 28, 2026, from <https://tracreports.org/tracatwork/detail/A6019.html>

3. Zitner, Aaron, Dante Chinni, and Brian McGill. (2016, June 7). *How Hillary Clinton Won the Democratic Nomination Over Bernie Sanders*. Wall Street Journal. Retrieved February 4, 2026, from <http://graphics.wsj.com/elections/2016/how-clinton-won/>

4. Goldmacher, S. (2024, November 17). *How Kamala*

Harris Burned Through \$1.5 Billion in 15 Weeks. The New York Times. <https://www.nytimes.com/2024/11/17/us/politics/harris-campaign-finance.html>

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6. *Zohran for NYC*. (2025, October 28). [https://www.zohranfornyc.com/platform](https://web.archive.org/web/20251028021013/https://www.zohranfornyc.com/platform)

What's Going On with Voting in America?

VOLUNTEER SUBMISSION BY KAYLIE WALKER

From federal elections to local elections to reality TV, I keep catching myself asking: who is behind these votes?

The Congressional Research Institute explains that the idea of the secret ballot began in the Gilded Age, when the transparent glass ballot box was replaced with the private ballot we know today.¹ The goal was to reduce election violence, intimidation, and bribery. Whether you agree with this being the “cornerstone of modern democracy” or not, it is easy to see that we have drifted far away from the idea of a secret vote.

Gone are the days of digging for someone’s voting records or registration history. Now, if you have a few minutes during a commercial break, you can find out who your favorite influencers, celebrities, or even family members voted for, because it is typically displayed on social media. But what happens when your love for politics clashes with your favorite hobbies in the worst way? Do you still support the idea of a private vote then?

This past season of *Love Island USA* showed record engagement and voter turnout, but many long-term fans



Provided by Flickr

were disappointed by how newer fans influenced the results.² We are now seeing similar frustrations in the newest season of *Dancing With The Stars*. As a chronic reality TV enthusiast, this has me and many others questioning the future of fan-based voting. With people online calling for less fan control and more judge control, I cannot help but wonder what that says about the trust we have in each other to vote “rationally.” With the ever-grow-

ing echo chambers created by algorithms, what does it say about our ability to understand how others could vote differently from us at all?

On the flip side, *Axios* reports that half of Gen Z voters and one in four U.S. voters overall have lied to people close to them about who they voted for.³ With the pressure of social media and judgment from friends and family, many claim that “the new social etiquette is to play Swit-

zerland.” Meanwhile, 58 percent of voters still say voting is a personal matter.

So, where do we draw the line? When the personal vote is in our favor? If the vote applies only to a reality show, we can choose not to watch. Personally, I would love to know who is voting for Andy Richter, but as a Dylan Efron fan, I understand the feeling of TikTok being collectively against you. Still, it would be ignorant to assume there is no crossover between the silent voters in major elections and the people deciding the fate of the mirrorball trophy.

When political voting and entertainment voting start to look the same, the meaning of a vote begins to shift. It becomes less about choosing who deserves to win and more about who we want to be seen supporting. Whether it is a presidential candidate or a reality show contestant, a vote is no longer just a decision. It becomes part of who we are, how we present ourselves, and what we want others to believe about us. That might be the most revealing part of all of this.

1. D'Angelo, J. (2024, December 16). *How the Secret Ballot Ended the Gilded Age... The Congressional Research Institute.* <https://www.congressionalresearch.org/SecretBallot.html>

2. Hailu, S. (2025, August 7). 'Love Island USA' Achieves Its Biggest Week Ever With 1.9 Billion Minutes Watched, Becoming Nielsen's No. 1 Most-Streamed Show of the

Week for the First Time. *Variety Magazine.* <https://variety.com/2025/tv/news/love-island-usa-ratings-1236481901/>

3. Talev, M. (2024, October 30). America's youngest voters become major election liars. *Axios.* <https://www.axios.com/2024/10/30/election-gen-z-voting-lies>

Students Prepare to Vote on Future of U-PASS Program

The future of their U-PASS is in your hands as an upcoming referendum will determine whether the service continues after proposed changes take effect in 2026.

At the centre of the vote is a recommended \$8 increase to the per-semester U-PASS fee starting September 2026, raising the total from \$70 to \$80 per semester. With the UBCO subsidy applied, students currently pay \$63, which would change to \$71 if the proposal passes. The referendum also asks whether you support indexing future fees to the Adult 30-Day Pass, a move intended to remove the need

for repeated referendums on rate adjustments.

Supporters of the “Yes” vote argue the change is crucial to preserve a service relied upon by thousands of students. The U-PASS offers one of the most significant transportation discounts available, four months of transit for the price of one, a value that many say would be impossible to replicate without collective participation.

Failure to approve the fee increase could put the future of the program at risk and without the U-PASS, students could face higher transit costs and the

possibility of reduced service across regional routes used heavily by the campus community.

Advocates also emphasize that the benefits extend beyond current transit riders. Even students who normally drive can see advantages, including less congestion and more available parking on campus when more people choose the bus.

Voting will take place online through the Student Union Okanagan’s Simply Voting platform. Additional details, including full referendum wording, are available through the SUO’s website in-

cluding date and time of voting (see Referendum Question 2025/2026 - U-PASS information - Students’ Union Okanagan of UBC).¹

The U-PASS is offered in partnership with BC Transit, local government partners, UBC Okanagan, and the Student Union Okanagan. The outcome of the vote will determine whether the program continues in its current form or undergoes significant changes heading into the 2026 academic year.

1. *Referendum Question 2025/2026—U-PASS information.* (n.d.). *Students’ Union Okanagan of UBC.* <https://www.suo.ca/referendum-question-2025-2026-u-pass-information/>

A “Pitch Perfect” Weekend: 2026 ICCA Recap

On January 24, 2026, The Beats’ competitive a cappella teams, the Trill Seekers and the Trebled Acoholics participated in the 2026 International Collegiate Championship of A cappella West Quarterfinal at the Tacoma Armory in Washington, the United States. Both teams made brilliant achievements, and more importantly, had a lot of fun together.



Provided by Jake Young

The Trebled Acoholics achieved a score of 300, marking the team’s best result over the last eight years since scoring 333 in 2018.



Provided by Jake Young

After all the teams’ talented performances and a little dance party at the back of the Armory, we gathered on stage for the results. The MC, Jake Yoakum spoke into the mic, “In second place, drumroll please ... the Trill Seekers!”

With 385 points, The Beats’ intensive competitive team earned themselves a spot at the West Semifinals for the first time in history. TS’s musical directors, Michael Adebiji and Angela Dela Santa, also won Outstanding Choreography.

TS needs you to help them get to Semis.

Semifinals will take place on March 21, 2026 at the Fox Theatre in Redwood City, California.

The team is currently raising funds for their trip to Redwood City. To support them, please visit <https://gofund.me/56ed12d85> to read about the team’s journey and donate to them; spread the news and share the aforementioned link with friends and family; follow TS’s Instagram (@thetrillseekers_) to stay updated on their journey.

FINNED HEART

by Brendan James

Estimated Difficulty: 4/5

	1	2	3		4	6	7	
	9			7			8	
	4						6	
	8	9				1	2	
		6	1		9	3		
			4	3	8			
	7			2			3	
	3	4	6		7	8	9	