

Challenging the Overton Window

<https://www.taxresearch.org.uk/Blog/2025/08/11/challenging-the-overton-window/>

Published: January 12, 2026, 8:17 pm

Roy Lilley, in [his daily mail](#) on what is happening in the NHS, made some excellent points this morning.

In particular, he talked about the '[Overton Window](#)'.

As he noted (and I have edited this very lightly and merely for grammatical reasons so that the quotes flow):

This is no ordinary window. Not a casement window, nor a bay window. Nothing like a French window. It's not really a window at all. It's a metaphoric window; a window named after the American policy analyst, in the 1990s, at the Mackinac Centre for Public Policy... Joseph Overton.

He proposed that the political viability of an idea depends mainly on whether it falls within an acceptability range and not on the individual preferences of politicians. He scaled ideas as follows:

*
unthinkable,

*
radical,

*
acceptable,

*
sensible,

*

popular and

policy.

As he then noted:

The most common misconception is that lawmakers are in the business of shifting the Overton window. Wrong...

... politicians are actually in the business of detecting where the window is and then moving policy to be in-frame with it.

Public opinion... very important. Hence focus groups and people paid shed-loads to monitor social media... finding 'the window'.

And as an example, he suggested:

... the Overton Window, the range of ideas the public will accept, is shifting on illegal migration. Opinion polls and political rhetoric respond to heightened media coverage, economic pressures and concerns over border control.

Once marginal-proposals such as, tougher enforcement or offshore processing, have moved toward the centre of debate.

I mention this for three reasons.

Firstly, Roy's mail is worth subscribing to.

Secondly, he is right about the Overton window.

Thirdly, and most importantly from my perspective, what Roy has to say explains why I am not a politician, but I am instead someone engaged in creating ideas that challenge the political consensus.

Roy is entirely right to say:

Politicians are actually in the business of detecting where the window is and then moving policy to be in-frame with it.

We can see this happening every day, and most particularly in the decline and fall of the Labour Party.

I, on the other hand, am not in the slightest bit interested in doing this. Instead, all I

want to do is shift the Overton window. My goal is to change public understanding and to make ideas currently unacceptable into things that are both popular and policy. And, there is a very good reason for trying to do that. People could be vastly better off as a result.

I do not now, and never have, underestimated the challenge that this represents, but to waste time on politics within a framework of thinking that has been established by neoliberal thinkers and those who promote neoliberal ideas in the mainstream media is, in my opinion, to live a wasted life. To be meaningful, we have to shift the Overton window in ways that will benefit most people against whom the odds are otherwise stacked at present. That is what this blog is about.

Comments

When commenting, please take note of this blog's comment policy, [**which is available here**](#). **Contravening this policy will result in comments being deleted before or after initial publication at the editor's sole discretion and without explanation being required or offered.**