

Is neoliberalism dying: the debate

Published: January 30, 2026, 7:17 am

We published a video on 25 January entitled '[Neoliberalism is dying: what's next?](#)'

It has been viewed 84,000 times so far. More than 1,250 comments have been made. They are not moderated. And those comments on our videos are now of increasing interest to us, and we are analysing them, especially on more popular videos where a wide variety of views are expressed.

We have tried to do this in a number of ways and have found ChatGPT useful in doing so. The analysis that follows focuses on the top 200 comments on this post, ranked by likes and responses. I thought this was worth sharing, and further comments are welcome, especially on what we might do in response.

Key Themes, Arguments, and Questions in the Comment Threads on '[Neoliberalism is dying: what's next?](#)'

1) Neoliberalism as a rigged system, not a neutral “free market”

A dominant theme is that “free market” rhetoric is seen as branding rather than reality. Multiple commenters argue that what is sold as market discipline is selectively applied: corporations and the wealthy receive subsidies, bailouts, tax breaks, and legal advantages, while ordinary people face austerity, precarious work, and strict “personal responsibility.”

Key claims in this theme:

- * The market is described as structurally biased: “socialism for the rich...rugged individualism for the rest.”
- * “Corporate welfare” is framed as the real operating system beneath the “free market” label.

- * The concept of a neutral market is rejected: neoliberalism is depicted as state-enabled (rules, enforcement, bailouts), not “small government.”
- * This theme also includes a moral framing: the system isn’t merely inefficient—it is portrayed as illegitimate and extractive.

2) Neoliberalism as political project: extraction, rentierism, and “subscription life”

One long comment sets the tone for a deeper analysis: neoliberalism is framed less as an economic theory and more as a political weapon designed to:

- * De-legitimise the state as a vehicle for collective good.
- * Re-legitimise concentrated wealth as “merit.”
- * Transform citizenship into a consumer relationship—“rent your life.”

A key concept repeated in different forms is the shift from productive capitalism to rentier capitalism:

- * Productive capitalism is associated with industrial innovation.
- * Rentier capitalism is associated with financialisation, subscriptions, paywalls, tax havens, monopolies, and extraction.

This analysis resonates with other comments that mention “hollowed out growth capacity,” “wealth concentration,” and “nothing makes sense anymore if you aren’t asset wealthy.” It’s essentially a story of systemic transformation: not just “bad policy,” but a restructuring of society around extraction.

3) Thatcher/Reagan era as the origin story and cultural turning point

A major narrative anchor is the 1980s—often personalised through lived memory:

- * Thatcher is described as doing “more damage” than wartime bombing (hyperbolic but expressive).
- * Reagan, Thatcher, and Mulroney are named as a trio (UK/US/Canada) who mainstreamed the model.

Several commenters describe watching the “deification of the market” and the elevation of the rich to quasi-priestly status.

This theme includes:

- * A sense of delayed vindication (“finally the truth is coming out”).
- * Intergenerational tension (“Boomers agreeing with the Boomers. All nonsense.”).
- * A broader claim that privatisation and social atomization spread globally, even through nominally “left” parties.

4) The “social contract” and middle-class decline

Many comments converge on the idea that something like a social contract has broken:

- * A repeated framing is middle-class erosion and working-class precarity.
- * One commenter directly asks whether the undermining of the middle class counts as “making the poor poorer,” even if absolute poverty declines globally.

Core elements:

- * Housing/rent and cost-of-living pressures appear implicitly as key stressors.
- * Anxiety and overwork are emphasised (“worked into the ground”).

A political conclusion follows: people feel abandoned, which fuels anger and opens the door to demagogues.

This theme often functions as a bridge between moral critique and political consequence: economic insecurity is linked to polarisation, resentment, and authoritarian temptations.

5) Is neoliberalism “dying” or entrenched?

A substantial dispute was about the video’s implied thesis: that neoliberalism is in decline.

Some commenters agree and frame current politics as the “mask off” phase.

Others pushed back: neoliberalism remains dominant and adaptable; Carney is seen as part of it, not its undertaker.

A specific subtheme is whether elite speeches (like Davos) can represent a genuine ideological shift or just rebranding (“snake oil”).

So the argument isn’t just “neoliberalism is bad,” but whether we’re at an endpoint versus a continuation with new packaging.

6) State power: necessary tool or inevitable threat?

A major fault line emerges around the role of the state:

- * One camp argues the state is essential and already active: neoliberalism depends on state enforcement and policy design.
- * Another camp fears state power itself as the core danger, citing historical atrocities and modern examples of repression.

This creates a recurring tension:

- * Anti-neoliberal critique often calls for rebuilding public capacity (“politics of care,” Nordic model, protecting middle/working classes by law).
- * Anti-state critique warns that expanding state capacity risks surveillance, censorship, arbitrary power, and the erosion of rights.

This tension is one of the most important “structural debates” in the threads: even among people critical of the current system, there is disagreement about whether the solution is more state capacity (welfare, regulation, redistribution) or less centralised power.

7) Democracy, “uniparty,” and legitimacy

Several commenters express democratic disillusionment:

- * Neoliberalism is described as “invented as a solution to democracy,” and producing a “uniparty” where outcomes don’t change regardless of elections.
- * Others reference “too much democracy”.

The underlying sentiment is that democratic choice is constrained by elite consensus, media narratives, and institutional inertia. This theme overlaps with a “rigged system” argument but shifts from economics to political legitimacy: the system is not only unfair, but unresponsive.

8) Climate, bunkers, and exit fantasies

Climate appears as an “ultimate market failure” and moral indictment:

- * Environmentalists were mocked; now consequences are unavoidable.
- * The ultra-wealthy are portrayed as planning escape (bunkers, “freedom cities,” Mars) rather than repair: an image of end-stage irresponsibility.

This becomes symbolic: elites extracting value and then extracting themselves from

consequences.

9) Culture-war drift and controversial side-threads

As in many YouTube comment sections, subthreads drift into polarising issues:

- * Speech laws, protests, and Gaza appear in the anti-state thread.
- * Hungary and Orbán appear via a “strong leader resisting pressure” argument.
- * Elon Musk, data scraping, and AI appear as examples of extraction and dystopian consolidation.

These side-threads show how a comment section can become a convergence point for multiple grievances, even when the video topic is more specific.

10) Questions asked (explicit and implicit)

Several key questions animate the threads:

- * What’s the solution? (Asked directly: “what’s the solution ?!?”)
- * Does middle-class decline count as impoverishment even if absolute poverty globally falls?
- * Is neoliberalism actually dying, or just mutating?
- * What role should the state play: protector of the public, or threat to liberty?
- * Can change happen via reform/ballot box (Greens/Corbyn/reform) or does “revolution” inevitably produce new authoritarianism (“you get a Napoleon”)?
- * Who benefits from the current order, and is it intentional design or corruption layered onto “free markets”?

Bottom line

The threads cluster around a shared diagnosis—neoliberalism as extractive and elite-serving—but split sharply on prognosis (dying vs entrenched) and prescription (rebuild the state vs restrain it; reform vs revolution). The comment section functions as a hybrid of public catharsis, ideological sorting, and informal political education—typical of YouTube, where short slogans and long essays coexist, and where a single video becomes a staging ground for broader anxieties about democracy, inequality, climate, and power.

A last word

I should add one final comment: when I last looked, 9,339 people had liked or disliked this post (meaning 11% of those watching the video had voted), and 99% of those voting had liked the video, with 1% suggesting that they disliked it. The negative comments noted above need to be read in that light.