

# Is the politics of grievance running out of road?

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There are signs that the politics of grievance is running out of road

News over the weekend has been revealing.

In the UK, [there has been growing speculation](#) about Nigel Farage's future.

In the USA, [Donald Trump has made](#) headlines by suggesting that Republicans could change the rules governing elections so that they need never lose power again.

These are different men in different political systems with different supporters, but there are similarities that might suggest common issues.

Farage's politics has always depended on his own personality. He has been the campaign, the message, and the movement, all in one person, across a succession of political parties. As is now clear, that works well enough as long as the movement only has to oppose things. It works much less well once people start asking what he is going to do, or what happens when he is no longer there to lead it. A movement built around grievance rarely bothers to build the institutions, the shared leadership and the internal resilience that outlast one man. Farage now faces the consequence of his own egotistical approach to politics.

Trump's story looks different, at least superficially. He is not, apparently, fading. He holds power. Yet talk of changing electoral rules so that his party need not lose again suggests he, too, is losing his grip. Any movement that is confident that it can keep winning the argument does not need to change the rules for winning. Whatever his intention, those remarks point to the same underlying weakness as Farage's succession problem.

Trump was elected on the back of understandable grievance that he exploited for personal and political gain, and as we now know, grievance is good for winning elections. Unaddressed, however, it is not much good at suggesting why the next election should be won if the grievance remains unaddressed.

That, I suggest, is the thread connecting these two stories. Trump and Farage share both politics and grievances. They both play the role of outsiders, although they are consummate insiders. They both vilify migrants, the left, climate change, and those they think are "woke". And both are finding that their grievance politics keeps hitting the same wall. It can identify enemies, but it struggles to build anything that can withstand contact with the issues they exploited to secure their positions.

This matters. Grievance has been a dominant theme within Western politics for two decades. Migrants have been blamed. Bureaucrats have been blamed. Brussels, China, judges, universities and the media have all been blamed in turn. Some of that criticism has had merit: it is a fact that neoliberal institutions have failed people. But identifying failure is not the same as building success, and a strategy built on identifying enemies eventually has to answer a straightforward question. The person naming the issue eventually has to say what they are going to do about it.

Here Farage and Trump also share common ground. They suggest lower taxes, smaller government, less regulation, and tighter borders. These might be genuine positions, and not merely grievances dressed up as policy. The problem for them is that such a programme inherits, almost entirely, the neoliberal ideology it claims to be rebelling against. It still assumes markets, individual effort and national identity rather than national government can deliver security on their own. That assumption was already failing under neoliberalism. Neither Farage nor Trump borrowing it fixes it.

People still need, and know they need, healthcare, housing, education, social care, infrastructure to tackle climate change and a pension that will actually support them in old age. None of that is delivered by finding another enemy. All of it requires institutions that work, and a state willing to use its own capacity to make them work. The offerings from Trump and Farage do not do that. They are not seeking to resolve the grievances we know exist. If anything, they are exacerbating them.

When this is realised, and it seems that it may be, the narrative of grievance no longer does these men a favour. Nor does it help their parties, neither of which contains in their ranks anyone with the charisma, let alone the narrative-spieling ability, to be an obvious heir apparent to these two. That is because neither man nor party understands any of the economics required to address the grievances those who have supported and been exploited by them need addressed.

That is why I think politics is approaching a turning point, even if I would not put it more strongly than that. The neoliberal promise from the centre-right (whether Labour, Liberal Democrat, or Conservative in the UK, or Democrat in the USA) and the far-right populists (whether Republican in the USA, or Reform and Restore in the UK) has not delivered. If anything, the populists have done this worse than the centre-right, with a much shorter likely political lifespan as a result. Being permanently angry is exhausting, and exhaustion is not the foundation of almost anything constructive. That is what is now showing.

The great unknown in all of this is that what comes after grievance is not set clear. One route is more authoritarian politics of the sort Trump seems determined to promote. He is seeking to change the rules, attack independent institutions, find new enemies, and demand more loyalty. That is also the direction in which the UK far-right now seems to be headed.

I cannot be sure whether the troubles, be they personal or political, facing Trump and Farage mark the beginning of the end for the politics they represent. History rarely obliges with a tidy ending. What does seem true is that the politics of grievance is running into a problem it has never solved. Sooner or later, every movement has to say not only what it opposes but also what it intends to build. My suspicion is these two, and all those who aspire to be like them, are unable to do that.

For anyone arguing for a politics of care, that is the opening. The task is not simply to criticise a politics built on blame. It is to show, in practical and financial terms, what government can do once it stops pretending it cannot afford to help people flourish. This is the alternative to the politics of grievance and hate we have suffered for too long.