

Print Edition

Friday 7 August 2026

EDITION NO. 15 • 3 PIECES • 8 PAGES

IN THIS EDITION

- | | | |
|----|---|---|
| 1. | <i>Are the Democrats going to save us this time?</i> • Noahpinion | 1 |
| 2. | <i>The Zerve AI Fellowship</i> • Stephen Kinsella's Newsletter | 6 |
| 3. | <i>The response prior</i> • The Update | 7 |
-

Are the Democrats going to save us this time?

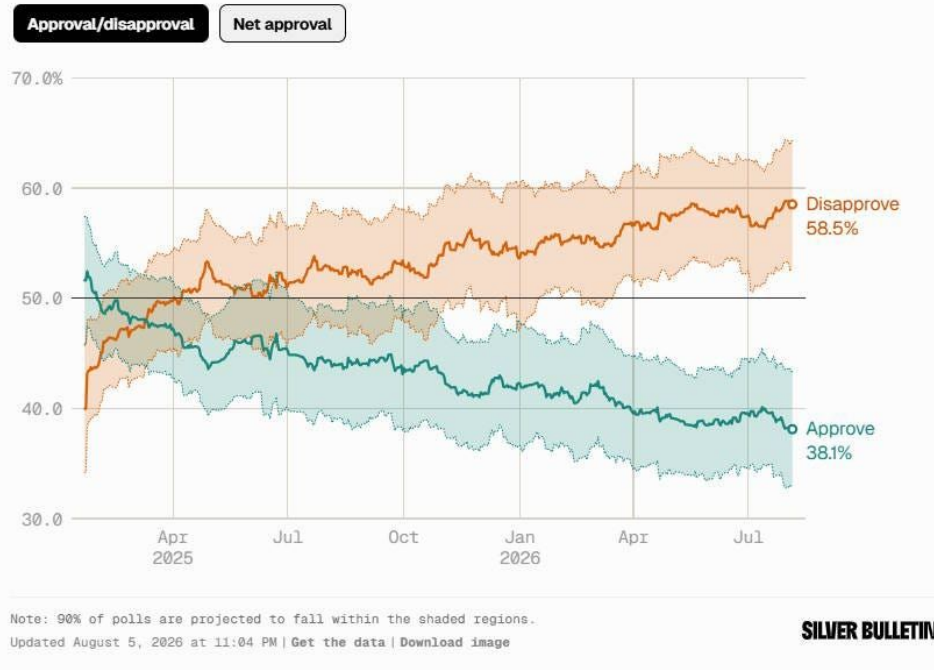
BY NOAH SMITH • NOAHPINION • 6 AUGUST 2026



Some people thought Donald Trump's approval rating would have a floor around 40%. Well, it didn't:

Do Americans approve or disapprove of Donald Trump?

An updating polling average of Donald Trump's approval rating and disapproval rating in his second term, accounting for each poll's quality, recency, sample size, and partisan lean



Source: Nate Silver

The nation's disapprobation is richly deserved. I hardly need to go through the familiar litany of why Trump is bad — the failed war in Iran, the ridiculous tariffs, the destruction of America's alliances and prestige, the attack on American science, the rampages of ICE, the unprecedented corruption, the authoritarianism, the election denial, the appeasement of Russia, etc. I guess I just did go through it, though. It feels a little cathartic to type it out once again.

If you think the GOP will return to being the party of Mitt Romney, John McCain, or Ronald Reagan after Trump is gone, think again. MAGA is already morphing from a personality cult into an ideology — a deeply xenophobic, economically retrograde ideology obsessed with expelling immigrants, and convinced that wealth has made the West immoral and weak. The party's lower ranks are already filling up with unabashed fascists, Hitler apologists, and all sorts of scary people:

GOP veterans fret about the rising generation of young staffers in their party...Of specific concern are those labeled groypers — technically, followers of the self-described "White Identitarian" Gen Z streamer Nick Fuentes, though it's also used as a catch-all term of abuse for young, anti-establishment right-wingers...

Prominent conservative commentators have alleged that groyperism is spreading among younger members of the GOP, including in government — a view seemingly backed by examples like the young Trump administration lawyer who admitted to a "Nazi streak" in text messages...The anxiety over groyperism in the GOP talent pool corresponds to a rise in antisemitism across the political spectrum,

including among young conservatives...A Manhattan Institute poll found that a full 25 percent of Republicans under 50 self-identified as having antisemitic views, and 31 percent as holding racist ones... [T]he troubling anecdotes are legion: gas chamber jokes and ethnic slurs bandied about on Young Republican group chats leaked to POLITICO last fall; a *New York Magazine* report from just last week linking a former New York Young Republican treasurer to a social media account denigrating Jews, Black people, Muslims and gay people; a House campaign adviser fired for mocking a rape victim on X; the Ron DeSantis presidential campaign staffer axed for retweeting a video featuring a Nazi image, only to join the office of Sen. Eric Schmitt (R-Mo.) and, eventually, the State Department, where he works today.

Meanwhile, at the top of the party, election denial has become a litmus test — a profession of faith for the bizarre Trump cult. The number of Republicans who will declare in public, in no uncertain terms, that the 2020 election was legitimate is now negligible. And being a vocal election denier is a fast track to prominence in the modern GOP — witness Tom Tiffany, the Republican candidate for the governorship of Wisconsin.

I see no reason to expect anything good from the modern GOP. When good ideas do make their way into Republican policy, it's generally by heroic pragmatists quietly working within the system. But those small victories are becoming smaller and less frequent, as MAGA's obsession with waging political warfare against its near-infinite roster of enemies muscles out any concern for the good of the nation as a whole. Americans are fed up with this, and they are very right to be fed up.

The Republicans have never been this bad before. But in the past, when they got bad, the solution was always pretty simple: Vote for the Democrats. Democracy isn't perfect, but it does have a natural release valve; you can always just "throw the bums out." And that's exactly what we used to do. In 2006, 2008, 2018, and 2020, we grew disgusted with the GOP's antics and elected Democrats to replace them.

I think if you look at those episodes, you can see a pattern of diminishing returns. Obama was a broadly successful president on domestic policy — he implemented broadly successful anti-recessionary macroeconomic policies, reformed health care and finance, and beefed up the welfare state. Biden gave us the return of industrial policy, but his fiscal profligacy — often squandered on things like student debt forgiveness and subsidies for already-overpriced service industries — contributed to inflation and did nothing to rein in the ballooning debt. On social issues, Obama was a moderate who tried and failed to curb his party's drift to the left; Biden didn't even try, running as a moderate but letting "woke" subordinates implement a lot of unpopular culture-war stuff.

Now it's 2026, and the Republican regime in power is far worse than its predecessors in either the 2000s or the 2010s. Once again, we have the option of electing Democrats. And we *should* elect Democrats, this November. There is no ambiguity here; a Congress that challenges Trump's lawlessness, investigates his unbridled corruption, and takes a more forceful

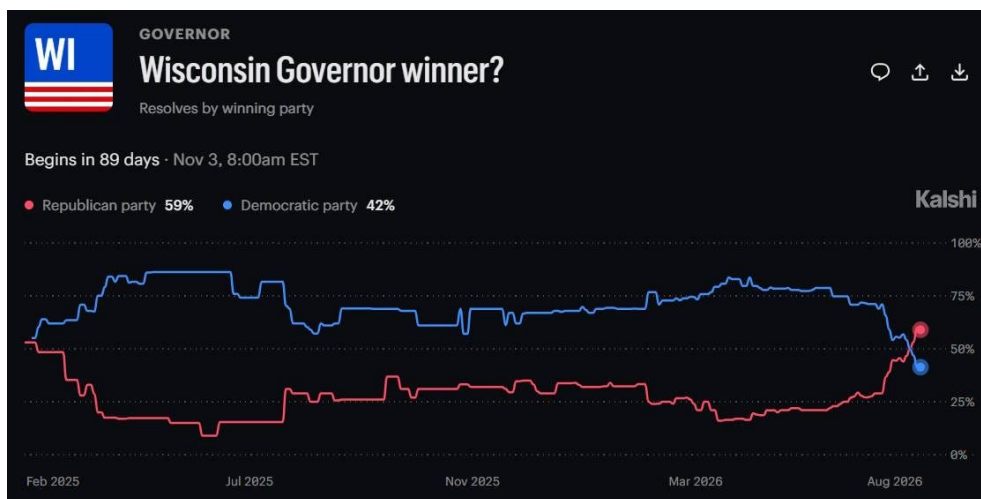
stand in favor of Ukraine will be unambiguously better than the supine GOP Congress that can do nothing except worship at the man's feet.

But at the same time, looking at the way the Democratic Party is headed, I think we should be asking *how much* better things will be under Democrats, including if they win the White House in 2028.

Let's look at the type of candidates who are winning Democratic primaries. Francesca Hong, a DSA member who is all but certain to be the Democratic nominee for governor of Wisconsin, tweeted in 2020 that we should "cancel Thanksgiving". When asked in a recent interview if she had recanted that position, Hong refused, talking about how Thanksgiving was "incredibly painful" for many people:

As if that weren't tone-deaf enough, she appeared to criticize herself for marrying a white man (saying "assimilation...took over"), and talked about having a half-white son as "proximity to whiteness":

Hong backtracked a couple of days later, declaring that Thanksgiving is her "favorite holiday", but the damage appears to have been done — Bernie Sanders said he didn't think he would endorse her, and prediction markets immediately began to discount Hong's chances of beating her Republican opponent in the fall:



Source: Kalshi

Some had hoped that the Democrats' socialist faction would be able to escape some of the baggage of "woke 1", because of their focus on class politics, and because the Palestine issue might be able to muscle aside a whole bunch of unpopular 2010s-era culture-war stances. But Hong shows that this hope will be in vain; the DSA types are the wokeest of the woke.¹ A number of leftists, such as Bernie Sanders' former campaign press secretary Briahna Joy Gray, doubled down on Hong's anti-Thanksgiving stance:

Meanwhile, a number of progressive commentators, like Mehdi Hasan, castigated moderates for suggesting that Hong might not be worth voting for, pointing out that Hong's opponent is an election denier:

This demonstrates exactly what I mean when I say that Democrats have spent their political capital moving to the left. Trump's vast number of mistakes and outrages have alienated much of the country. Democrats could have used this alienation and outrage to become a long-term major-

ity party, and relegate Republicans to the political wilderness — a just and fitting punishment for falling in line behind a man like Trump.

Instead, what they're apparently choosing to do is to select candidates who are so far to the left that they end up frightening and/or offending many voters, and then basically daring people to keep voting for the Republicans. Sure, she wants to cancel Thanksgiving, but you wouldn't vote for a fascist election denier, would you? And so on. The median voter is pulled back into a state of disgusted ambivalence between two extremes, and people like Mehdi Hasan get to take the Democrats in their preferred direction.

(As an aside, if I lived in Wisconsin, I could not in good conscience cast a vote for either Tom Tiffany or Francesca Hong, so I'd just file a protest vote or leave it blank.)

When DSA-type candidates were just winning in deep blue cities, it was possible to think that they would remain a small, limited faction within the party. But Francesca Hong is the Democratic nominee in a statewide race. So is Abdul El-Sayed, who, while not a member of the DSA, is closely aligned with them (especially on Israel, which he focuses on a lot). El-Sayed just won his primary for the Michigan Senate race, but a closer-than-expected election, with very little working-class support, shows how his selection represents an expenditure of Democrats' political capital.

This, increasingly, is who the Democrats *are* now. It's doubtful that a leftist candidate will win the presidential nomination in 2028, but — just as Biden made concessions to Bernie Sanders supporters on student debt relief and other issues — whoever does get the nod two years from now is likely to let the ascendant DSA faction set a lot of policy priorities.

Meanwhile, the commentators promoting the DSA's cause continue to breathe fire. Hasan Piker, who is emerging as a key kingmaker within the rising leftist movement, called El-Sayed's Democratic critics "Islamophobic pieces of shit" (El-Sayed also accused his critics of Islamophobia).²

Compared to some other DSA types, though, Piker can seem downright moderate. Strident anti-American rhetoric is now standard among that faction:

And there are even less savory attitudes lurking in DSA-aligned activist spaces. Susan Abulhawa, a Palestinian-American writer and activist, repeated Nazi accusations that Jews stabbed Germany in the back in World War I:

The leftist magazine *Current Affairs*, meanwhile, recently published an article claiming that electronic dance music is a tool for ignoring genocide and upholding the "neoliberal order".

It's easy to dismiss this stuff as fringe radicalism that will never make itself to the mainstream of the party, but — as with "groypers" on the right — that increasingly feels like cope. Francesca Hong demonstrates that anti-American ideas have become fully mainstreamed and accepted within the Democratic Party; not everyone holds these beliefs, of course, but those who do hold them are firmly under the party's big tent, and will be given some degree of influence over policy.

A Democratic party in which leftists wield significant power will not be the Democratic Party of 2020 or 2008. It will be something else. Research

shows that leftists are not liberals — they have their own distinct ideology.

That ideology is not necessarily the antidote to MAGA. Yes, if DSA types held national power, things would be different. The disastrous Iran war would end, which would be a good thing. But on foreign policy in general, a faction that sees America as an evil empire seems unlikely to restore the liberal alliance system that Trump has thrown in the trashcan. Recall that the DSA blamed the United States and NATO for Russia's invasion of Ukraine, and called for withdrawal from NATO.

On economic policy, too, a DSA administration might look more Trumpian than we might hope. DSA types say they're now in favor of free trade (thanks to negative polarization against Trump's tariffs), but the impulse to protect American labor and exercise more command and control over the economy would probably prove irresistible. As for the national debt — the country's biggest looming economic threat — I just don't see the DSA as being the balanced-budget types. Remember that Francesca Hong wants to cut property taxes by 44%.

And where the DSA would break from Trumponomics, it wouldn't always be to the good. Trump has hurt the economy in some ways, but he has always been very careful not to mess with the AI buildout — the force that's keeping the economy afloat. The DSA, however — like many progressive Democrats — wants to halt data center construction. This, of course, would remove the U.S. economy's biggest tailwind.

I still think the choice of which party to vote for in 2026 and 2028 is unambiguous. Trump has been too bad, in too many ways, to think that he and his movement are the lesser of two evils. But to the degree that the DSA's increasingly frequent electoral victories translate into real power in the next Democratic administration, it seems like we have less to hope for from the Dems now than in times past. If the U.S. is going to turn its problems around, "throw the bums out" is no longer enough.

1

Kind of hilariously, Hong's defenders are saying that the woke stuff is just peripheral, and that her core issue is banning data centers. In other words, her more *reasonable* position is to ban the single industry that is currently keeping the American economy afloat.

2

In fact, this kind of accusation isn't uncommon in the Democratic Party these days. One of Francesca Hong's primary opponents claimed that her labeling of him as an "establishment" figure was racist.

The Zerve AI Fellowship

BY STEPHEN KINSELLA · STEPHEN KINSELLA'S NEWSLETTER · 6 AUGUST 2026

The Zerve AI Research Fellowship is open for applications. Being a researcher in the era of AI feels a bit like being at the bottom of a mountain. You can choose not to go up, but you can't avoid it.

I've been teaching myself much like everyone else, learning as I go what works for me and what doesn't. I have been blogging a bit about it on my substack.

One tool I have used a lot is Zerve AI. It solves lots of the problems most researchers might have around reproduction of research, data flows and much more. It's a cool Irish startup based in the MidWest.

The founders Phily Hayes and Jason Hillary are former UL students based in UL's Nexus Innovation Centre who have helped Immersive Software Engineering out many times, including taking students on residency, so I know they are good people taking on hard problems. AI in science is likely one of the hardest.

When I blogged about their platform they asked me to help out designing a fellowship programme for researchers using Zerve. I was delighted to, and that just went live.

Check it out [here](#).

They also made a video about the fellowship idea.

Apply and be accepted and you get:

- Tens of thousands of euros worth of credits,
- compute support (this is incredibly important when you are doing scaled work),
- research support, and
- direct technical support.

It's a very cool offer. The call is a rolling one, so apply away.

The response prior

BY STEFAN SCHUBERT · THE UPDATE · 6 AUGUST 2026

We can think of the chance that a particular threat ends in an existential disaster as determined by two factors:

- The difficulty of the problem (what it would take to prevent disaster)
- The effectiveness of our response (whether we'll do enough)

In my view, most attempts to estimate existential risk concentrate on the difficulty of the problem, and pay much less attention to our likely response. There are probably several reasons for this, but I think one has to do with the nature of typical existential risk research. While part of the job is to estimate the risk of an existential disaster – where both factors come into play – a more central part is to work out how to prevent it. And here researchers naturally focus on the first factor, since the response is something to bring about rather than to predict. I think this focus easily carries over when they turn to estimating the risk.

An overlooked asymmetry

This lopsided emphasis is unfortunate, since it's arguably easier to assess the likely effectiveness of the response than the difficulty of the problem. There's little precedent we can use to gauge the difficulty of preventing threats like AI misalignment. Instead, most analyses are based on causal models of how the threat might unfold and what it would take to stop it. It's difficult to build such models, and easy to become overconfident in conclusions that rest on long chains of conjectures.

On the other hand, we're in a better position to judge the response than many seem to think. It's true that we can't say exactly how we will respond to specific threats, but there is another way of approaching this question. Instead of asking what particular measures we'll take, we can ask whether we'll take whatever measures turn out to be necessary. We can consult history: to what extent did we take the right measures against past threats? While the difficulty of past threats tells us little about future threats, past responses can teach us much about future responses. Together with general knowledge of human psychology and societal institutions, this track record gives us a useful response prior.

Implications

Of course, a prior is only a starting point. Predictions of our likely response to, say, AI misalignment must also draw on the specifics of the case. But the response prior can still have major implications for estimates of existential risk. So what are those implications? I think there's room for reasonable disagreement about that. I'm more confident in the importance of the response prior than in what exactly it implies.

But my own response prior is shaped by my view of human agency. I think we often fall for the sleepwalking illusion, seeing ourselves as more passive than we really are. In fact, threats of disaster alarm us so much that we probably overshoot more than we undershoot. Moreover, our response tends to scale with the perceived threat. We are doing far more to stop climate change than we did to close the ozone hole – and if AI misalignment proves harder still, I'd expect an even more forceful response. Consequently, I think existential risk is lower than many researchers believe.

Granted, there are ways our response could fall short. We might not recognise the threat in time. Or we might fail to coordinate, even though we know what we need to do. These concerns are real, but I think they are sometimes given too much weight. There are many researchers scanning for new threats, and governments listen to them more than it might seem. And nuclear arms control suggests that when the alternative is death, even sworn enemies can coordinate. Human agency reaches further than we intuitively think.