

# Policy Matters



Your weekly digest of policy reports that **matter**.  
Edited by [Toby Green](#) and [Gary Price](#) of *Policy Commons*.

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## US election

### **Americans have never had it so good. So why isn't it visible in the polls?**

With the economy doing badly in 1980, the challenger, Ronald Reagan, won the White House after he asked voters, "Are you better off?" Today, Americans objectively are better off in a booming economy. So why is the incumbent, Vice President Harris, only neck and neck with Trump in the polls? The answer might be because today's voters think beyond the economy. As [this illuminating report](#) shows, inequality and ever-rising health costs are undermining confidence in the American dream.

### **Does either candidate have a plan to reduce US debt?**

According to the bipartisan Committee for a Responsible Federal Budget, the answer is no. [They calculate](#) that Harris's policies will lift debt by \$3.5 trillion, while Trump's will increase it by \$7.5 trillion.

### **What about European security if Trump wins?**

The New Diplomacy Project and Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung have been [mulling over the options for NATO, Ukraine, and Europe's security](#) in the event Trump wins next month.

## China and the Axis of Upheaval

[Foreign Affairs](#) calls China, Russia, North Korea, and Iran the "Axis of Upheaval." [In this timely edition of Institut Montaigne's "China Trends"](#) series, China's balancing act with its volatile allies is analyzed and explored.

## Water: climate's canary in the coal mine

According to the latest [State of Global Water Resources](#), rivers are drying up, putting the global water supply at risk. This might seem at odds with news of flooding in many parts of the world, but more than 50 percent of catchment areas are in deficit, especially the Amazon, Mississippi, Ganges, Brahmaputra, and Mekong. Glaciers are shrinking fast, too; Switzerland's have shrunk by 10 percent over the past two years.

## Wildlife declines fastest in Latin America and Caribbean

The latest biennial [Living Planet Report](#) from WWF contains stark warnings about the decline of ecosystems globally, especially in South America and the Caribbean. It was published ahead of next week's [COP16 Biodiversity Summit](#)—and we'll be keeping an eye out for other reports aimed at this meeting.

## Other reports that caught our eye last week:

- [Replace the REF](#)—is the UK's Research Excellence Framework (REF) too bureaucratic and unaffordable?
- [The State of Global Air Quality Funding 2024](#) complains that only 1 percent of global development funding goes to improving air quality, despite 8 million deaths caused by filthy air every year.
- Why did Britain outpace France when the industrial revolution started? [A fascinating NBER paper](#) suggests it was because British innovation networks in the eighteenth century were more closely aligned with its drivers.
- It's logical: AI engines—or more accurately LLMs—[make grade-school math errors](#)
- In [LGBTQI+ Atrocity Risks in Latin America: Community Perceptions and Opportunities for Prevention](#), key findings include threats from anti-rights groups, public officials who block LGBTQI+ access to rights, and criminal armed organizations.

## (Nobel Prize) search of the week: "societal institutions"

This year's Nobel Prize for Economics (formally, The Sveriges Riksbank Prize in Economic Sciences in Memory of Alfred Nobel 2024) recognised the importance of "societal institutions" for a country's prosperity. Essentially, the winners showed that a country will be more prosperous if its institutions are inclusive and not extractive. ([You can read the official background to why they won here.](#)) This got us looking to see how much content we have on this [Nobel-winning topic](#); it's more than we thought.

## Policy Matters on the road

Next week, Toby will be at [Lund Online](#), a gathering of scholarly communication stakeholders from across the Nordic region. Appropriately, the theme this year is "Turning Policy Into Practice." Registration is free. You'll find Toby on the Coherent Digital stand.

In November, both Gary and Toby look forward to seeing you at the [Charleston](#) conference. Bring your feedback on how we're doing!

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