

# Leaks are the real scandal, how gerrymandering effects Congress, and Trump's "Randian" foreign policy: roundup of US academic political blogging for 11 – 17 February

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 [blogs.lse.ac.uk/usappblog/2017/02/18/leaks-are-the-real-scandal-how-gerrymandering-effects-congress-and-trumps-randian-foreign-policy/](https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/usappblog/2017/02/18/leaks-are-the-real-scandal-how-gerrymandering-effects-congress-and-trumps-randian-foreign-policy/)

2/18/2017

USAPP Managing Editor, Chris Gilson looks at the best of the week's political blogging from academics and think-tanks. Don't see a blog referenced here that you think we should be reading? [Let us know](#) what we've missed out and we'll try to include it next week.

## Jump to

[President Trump and the Republican Party](#)

[The Democratic Party](#)

[The House and Senate](#)

[Elections and American democracy](#)

[The Government, Beltway and the Supreme Court](#)

[Foreign policy, defense and trade](#)

[Obamacare and health policy](#)

[The economy and society](#)

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## President Trump and the Republican Party

This week, *Outside the Beltway* [writes](#) that President Trump's Twitter feed is a good illustration that he has not really switched from campaigning to governing mode, after Trump stated that "Pocahontas" – his name for Massachusetts Senator, Elizabeth Warren – was now the face of the Democratic Party. Perhaps one reason why Trump tends to put so many thoughts into short tweets is that he does not read, but watched TV, [suggests](#) *Epic Journey*.

On Sunday, the *Sussex Centre for the Study of Corruption* [looks](#) at whether or not Donald Trump's use of his Mar-e-Lago private members' club as a "Winter White House", could lead to corruption allegations. Since moving into the White House the Mar-e-Lago joining fee has doubled to \$200,000, meaning that Trump is likely to benefit financially from the presidency. *Outside the Beltway* meanwhile [reports](#) that a Trump advisor and author of the controversial immigration executive order, Stephen Miller, has stated that the "president's powers [to ban the entry of foreigners] are beyond question", and that unelected judges cannot "make laws for the entire country". *Lawyers, Guns & Money* [talks](#) Miller – who this week also stated that voter fraud cost Trump votes in New Hampshire last year – commenting that journalists should "impose a blackout" on him, because of his false statements. On Thursday, *ImmigrationProf* [blog reports](#) that rather than pushing against the stay of the current executive order on immigration by the courts, the administration will soon be releasing a new, narrower executive order to replace it.

On Tuesday this week, following the resignation of Michael Flynn as National Security Adviser, *FiveThirtyEight* [looks](#) at whether the Trump administration is in disarray. *American Power* [comments](#) Wednesday that narratives of "crisis" about the Trump administration are just "leftist media agitating...to destroy the administration". *Lawfare* [writes](#) that amidst this week's chaos, Trump has found the "real scandal" affecting his administration – leaks from US

intelligence agencies. They say this accusation raises a number of concerns; there's no reason to assume that these are intelligence community leaks, Trump appears to be more interested in hunting down the source of the leaks than getting to the bottom of the allegations against his administration, and he may be signaling that he intends to use accusations of leaking as political retaliation.

In the wake of the withdrawal of President Trump's pick for Secretary of Labor, Andy Pudzer, *FiveThirtyEight* [says](#) that the nomination failed because he faced several scandals (including allegations of employing an undocumented worker and now rescinded claims of domestic violence), and because he was an "awkward" ideological fit for Trump's base of supporters.

On Thursday, Donald Trump held a 77-minute long press conference and Q&A session. In it he stated that he "inherited a mess". *Epic Journey* gives an [overview](#) of similar statements from previous presidents about the problems that they had inherited from earlier administrations.

Turning now to the wider Republican Party, *Lawyers, Guns & Money* [wonders](#) what the policies are the GOP are so keen on, that they are fine with US foreign policy being conducted at Donald Trump's personal dinners, as was the case this week when Trump discussed North Korea's latest missile launch at dinner at Mar-e-Lago. It turns out, one such policy is to block states from launching programs which would enroll people into state –sponsored retirement-savings schemes. *Monkey Cage*, meanwhile, [writes](#) that for many decades, the GOP feared Russians. Now, with President Trump's election, Republicans are even more positive towards Russia than Democrats. *Outside the Beltway* [says](#) that the GOP are looking to break up the 9<sup>th</sup> Circuit Court of Appeals, which is also the Court which stayed Donald Trump's immigration ruling. They comment that conservatives have been targeting the 9<sup>th</sup> Circuit Court for a while now, mostly because of its rulings which have tended to be on the liberal side.

## The Democratic Party

What is the future of the Democratic Party? *FiveThirtyEight* [says](#) that, according to the party's "Bernie Sanders wing" it's to stop relying on models almost entirely and have much broader messages.

On Tuesday, *Monkey Cage* [posits](#) that what many see as being "Red" America – the post-industrial towns of the Midwest – is actually "Blue"; a significant base of Democratic support still remains.

## The House and Senate

Feel like Congress has gotten off to a slower start than normal under President Trump? Well, you'd been wrong, [according](#) to *FiveThirtyEight*, who say that Congress rarely passes more than a few bills in the first four weeks of a new president's term.



Rep. Jason Chaffetz (R-UT) Credit: personaldemocracy (Flickr, CC-BY-SA-2.0)

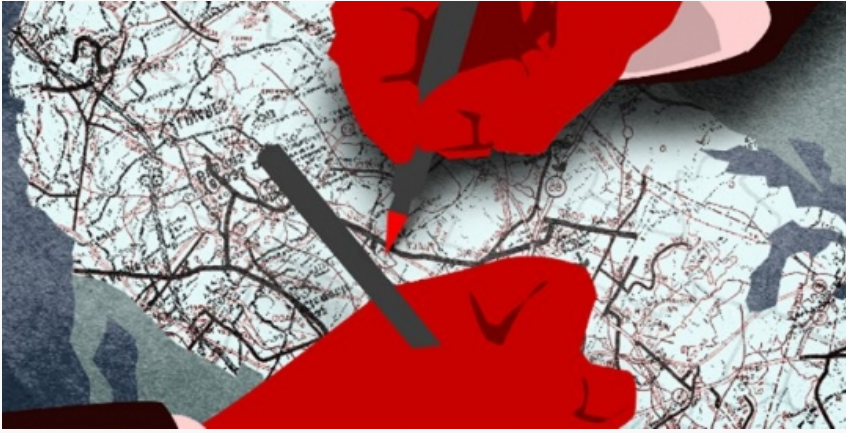
On Wednesday, *Vox's Polyarchy* [writes](#) that many constituents have been calling for members of Congress to “do their job”, and investigate Donald Trump, but that there are many incentives for them not to –a primary challenge being perhaps the highest on the list. They say that over the years Congress has ceded a great deal of power to the executive, a trend which has been made worse with falling Congressional staff budgets. Talking about jobs, *Balkinization* [wonders](#) if Representative Jason Chaffetz (R-UT) understands his as chair of the House Committee on Oversight and Government Reform. While Chaffetz spent a great deal of time investigating Hillary Clinton last year, he has little interest in doing the same for Donald Trump. Chaffetz is still actually looking into Clinton, even now; *Lawyers, Guns & Money* [reports](#) that he has sent a letter to the new Attorney General, Jeff Sessions, asking him to convene a grand jury or charge Bryan Pagliano, the computer specialist who helped Hillary Clinton to set up her private email server while she was Secretary of State.

Despite Chaffetz's seeming reluctance to take on Trump, Congressional critics are able to check the power of the president, [says Monkey Cage](#). They do this by pushing media coverage so that public opinion can go against a sitting president's actions.

Turning to the Senate, *Outside the Beltway* has the [news](#) that it has approved Steven Mnuchin to be Treasury Secretary, with 53 votes for, and 47 votes against him. On Wednesday, *Monkey Cage* [writes](#) that Senate Democrats are fighting each one of Trump's cabinet nominees hard. And while Trump's nominees are still winning, by and large, Democrats will also be able to delay many of the administration's low-level nominations, this delaying the new president's legislative agenda.

## **Elections and American democracy**

On Thursday, *Sabato's Crystal Ball* [presents](#) their initial Senate ratings for 2018. Of the 34 seats up for election, 23 have incumbent Democrats, 9 are Republican, and 2 are held by Independents. Three of the Democrats' seats are toss-ups, and five only lean towards the Democrats.



Credit: Truthout.org (Flickr, CC-BY-NC-SA-2.0)

*FiveThirtyEight* this week [wonders](#) if Donald Trump's poor approval ratings will be a problem for GOP candidates next year. They say that, at least in the House, the White House's party will tend to lose some seats in their first midterm, and that poor presidential approval ratings can exacerbate this trend. *Election Law Blog*, meanwhile, [looks](#) at a new study which has found that Republican gerrymandering has "little to no effect" on the partisan composition of Congress. The study finds that if congressional districts were drawn randomly, then the GOP would only lose a single seat in the House to the Democrats. *Statistical Modelling...* meanwhile also [talks](#) on the importance of gerrymandering, writing that it does not explain the larger pattern of polarization witnessed in recent years with near party-line votes on many policy areas and cabinet nominees.

On Tuesday, *Balkinization* [comments](#) on an alternative to impeachment in removing Donald Trump from the presidency – the 25<sup>th</sup> amendment. This would be invoked if the Vice-President and a majority of the Cabinet declare to Congress that the president is "unable to discharge the powers and duties of his office". If the original president attempted to return to duty, the now Acting President and Cabinet could override this within four days. This would then go to Congress, who would have to vote by 2/3 that the original president was unfit to resume office.

On Wednesday, *Duck of Minerva* also [talks](#) democracy – more specifically the role of academics in defending it.

## The Government, Beltway and the Supreme Court

This week, *The Money Illusion* [looks](#) at what would happen if the US Federal Reserve were to set a positive interest rate floor of 2 percent as has been recently proposed. They say that the proposal is "absolutely horrible or mindbogglingly insane" as it could easily cause another Great Depression.

On Sunday, *Outside the Beltway* [says](#) that there are now signs that the "Deep State" bureaucracy are checking Donald Trump's worst excesses by slowing down their own work or instituting protections for themselves or their colleagues.

Turning to the courts, *The Volokh Conspiracy* [writes](#) that the 9<sup>th</sup> Circuit Court's halt on Trump's executive order is "flawed". They argue that states did not have standing to challenge the legality of the order, and that the due process of those prevented from entering was not affected – because as aliens, they are not protected by the Constitution. *American Power*, meanwhile, [argues](#) that the 9<sup>th</sup> Circuit Court's decision ignores judicial precedent, and that it poses a danger to national security, because the countries the order targeted are "beset by terrorists".

On Thursday, *The Volokh Conspiracy* has the [news](#) that the Washington State Supreme Court has unanimously held that florists who supply weddings must provide arrangements for same-sex couples.

Turning to the Supreme Court, *Monkey Cage* [writes](#) Wednesday that given his past judicial decisions, if confirmed,

Judge Neil Gorsuch might end up being the most conservative justice on the Court.

## Foreign policy, defense and trade

Late last week, President Trump met with Japanese Prime Minister in Washington DC and then in Florida. *Monkey Cage* [discusses](#) whether Trump and Abe may have opened a new chapter in US-Japan relations, after their meeting struck a different chord compared to Trump's often fraught early dealings with foreign leaders.

On Thursday, *Lawfare* [looks](#) at foreign constraints on the Trump administration, such as US allies resisting being seen to help send new prisoners to the military prison in Guantánamo Bay, Cuba or not wishing to have US secret detention or interrogation facilities in their countries.

*Angry Bear* [writes](#) this week on the scale of Donald Trump's "botch" in Yemen, after one American was killed and three injured in the recent raid against Al-Qaeda there. New reports have shown that while the raid had been planned under President Obama, he had decided not to go through with it, feeling it to be "not a wise effort".

Turning to Trump's foreign policy more generally, *Duck of Minerva* [says](#) that it is "Randian" rather than "Jacksonian", in that it involves a profound distrust of international institutions and laws, as well as seeing foreign policy as a sequence of agreements which have winners and losers. *Political Violence @ a Glance* also [looks](#) at Trump's foreign policy, this time through the lens of political psychology. The write that older leaders like Trump have a higher risk of starting or escalating conflict, and given his propensity to "follow his gut" he may not actually be a particularly good negotiator.

One aspect of the Trump administration's foreign policy that had many world leaders concerned is its apparent willingness to alter the US' relationship with NATO. *Saidemann's Semi-Spew* [says](#) that warnings from the Secretary of Defense James Mattis that if its NATO allies do not boost their defense spending may mean a change in their relationship have been given at the wrong time (given Russia's recent resurgence on the international scene) by the wrong person.

## Obamacare and health policy

On Tuesday, *Lawyers, Guns & Money* [looks](#) at calls from some for the Golden State to leave the union in order to preserve programs such as Obamacare. They say that it's a horrible idea that would be a "complete and unmitigated disaster".

On Thursday, *Angry* [awards](#) the prize for the "dumbest statement coming out of Congress yet on healthcare" to Senator Rand Paul (R-KY), for his suggestion that the public could have their own health savings account, which would then (from his point of view) help to drive healthcare prices down.

## The economy, society and criminal justice

On Saturday, *Angry Bear* [says](#) that rising gas prices, and increasing inflation are continuing the ongoing stall in wage growth, which will in turn hurt consumers. *OxPol* also [talks](#) the economy, writing this week that declines in labor mobility helped contribute to Donald Trump's electoral victory last year, as Trump was able to convince those who have had a hard time finding a job that he would "bring the jobs back home". While the rust belt may have helped to elect Donald Trump, its electoral power is now [dwindling](#), says *Monkey Cage*.

Tuesday sees *ImmigrationProf blog* [discuss](#) a new study which shows that despite the claims of Donald Trump, low-income immigrants to the US access fewer benefits than the native-born.

February is black history month. *Clippings from The Society Pages* [says](#) that those who call for a "White History Month" are implying that whites are on a similar footing as those minorities which have their specific history month, and are ignoring that the fact that the way history is focused on already privileges whites.

Much of President Trump's anti-immigrant rhetoric has been based on what he argues is the risk of terrorism. But, as *Nicholas Kristof* [writes](#), in the US, husbands are deadlier than terrorists – and by a considerable margin.

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*Note: This article gives the views of the author, and not the position of USAPP– American Politics and Policy, nor of the London School of Economics.*

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