

## Cold Open

Find out just what any people will quietly submit to and you have found out the exact measure of injustice and wrong which will be imposed upon them, and these will continue till they are resisted with either words or blows, or with both. The limits of tyrants are prescribed by the endurance of those whom they oppress.

-Fredrick Douglas

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*Welcome to the Abracast everyone, I 'm Jon Towers. We hear this a lot in conspiracy culture; we hear about some shadowy group or sinister organization "pushing agendas" in media and culture. So I thought we could take a moment to stop, take a breath and look at one method that agendas are actually "pushed". We are going to look at current news items and news items from a few years ago and examine some agendas that are lurching forward incrementally. And we are going to track The Overton Window as it swings it open... or in some cases as a rock gets thrown thru it.*

*\*Hey, I got a very gentle complaint about the show being coming thru only one ear phone. I checked it on a bunch of apps and I can't find any episodes that only pipe thru one ear and not in both. If you guys are having this issue, please shoot me a line and help me nail this down and figure it out.*

*So I should do my general disclaimer when we do shows like this, that we are not talking politics. It is going to sound a lot like it at some points. But what we are talking about is how opinions are formed, and moverd... or how our opinions are shifted. And ultimately we are talking about the media.*

*We have a few a few featured articles this evening, so I'll call them out as we move through the episode.*

*\*Invite to drink\**

The **Overton window** is a term for the range of ideas tolerated in [public discourse](#), also known as the **window of discourse**. The term is named after [Joseph P. Overton](#), who stated that an idea's political viability depends mainly on whether it falls within this range, rather than on politicians' individual preferences.<sup>[1][2]</sup> According to Overton, the window contains the range of policies that a politician can recommend without appearing too extreme to gain or keep public office in the current climate of [public opinion](#).

Overton described a spectrum from "more free" to "less free" with regard to government intervention, oriented vertically on an axis, to avoid comparison with the left-right political spectrum.<sup>[3]</sup> As the spectrum moves or expands, an idea at a given location may become more

or less politically acceptable. Political commentator [Joshua Treviño](#) postulated that the degrees of acceptance of public ideas are roughly:<sup>[4]</sup><sup>[unreliable source?]</sup>

- Unthinkable
- Radical
- Acceptable
- Sensible
- Popular
- Policy

The Overton window is an approach to identifying which ideas define the domain of acceptability within a democracy's possible governmental policies. Proponents of policies outside the window seek to convince or persuade the public in order to move and/or expand the window. Proponents of current policies, or similar ones, within the window seek to convince people that policies outside it should be deemed unacceptable.

*Another way to look at this is sort of “creeping normalization”, or maybe, a better term would be driven creeping normalization, or weaponized creeping normalization, it’s the death by a thousand cuts, or like... the story of the frog in the hot water.*

*It is a way to sort of negotiate with the will of the people. Or a way to play tug of war with the will of the people.*

*So, Overton worked for a think tank, so lets look at the think tank’s role... political think tanks are... lobbyist. Sort of. They are an organization of policy wonks who come up with ways to promote their agendas.*

### **An Introduction to the Overton Window of Political Possibilities Nathan J. Russell – jan 2004**

To answer the inevitable questions about the role of a think tank, Overton developed an explanation that others have since dubbed the "[Overton Window of Political Possibilities](#)." Though his theory has roots in complex public choice economics, it boils down quite easily.<sup>[1]</sup>

Imagine, if you will, a yardstick standing on end. On either end are the extreme policy actions for any political issue. Between the ends lie all gradations of policy from one extreme to the other. The yardstick represents the full political spectrum for a particular issue. The essence of the Overton window is that only a portion of this policy spectrum is within the realm of the politically possible at any time. Regardless of how vigorously a think tank or other group may campaign, only policy initiatives within this window of the politically possible will meet with success. Why is this?

Politicians are constrained by ideas, even if they have no interest in them personally. What they can accomplish, the legislation they can sponsor and support while still achieving political success (i.e. winning reelection or leaving the party strong for their successor), is framed by the set of ideas held by their constituents — the way people think. Politicians have the flexibility to

make up their own minds, but negative consequences await the elected officeholder who strays too far. A politician's success or failure stems from how well they understand and amplify the ideas and ideals held by those who elected them.

In addition to being dependent on the ideas that form the boundaries of the political climate, politicians are also known to be self-interested and desirous of obtaining the best political result for themselves.<sup>[2]</sup> Therefore, they will almost always constrain themselves to taking actions within the "window" of ideas approved of by the electorate. Actions outside of this window, while theoretically possible, and maybe more optimal in terms of sound policy, are politically unsuccessful. Even if a few legislators were willing to stick out their necks for an action outside the window, most would not risk the disfavor of their constituents. They may seek the good of those who elected them, and even the good of the state or nation as a whole, but in pursuing the course they think is best, most will certainly take into account their political future. This is the heart of the Overton window theory.

So, if a think tank's research and the principles of sound policy suggest a particular idea that lies outside the Overton window, what is to be done? *Shift the window*. Since commonly held ideas, attitudes and presumptions frame what is politically possible and create the "window," a change in the opinions held by politicians and the people in general will shift it. Move the window of what is politically possible and those policies previously impractical can become the next great popular and legislative rage...

*So let us look at some agendas that are being pushed. And as I am going thru these, let's think back to I don't know, the Obama years or if your old enough to remember the Bush years, and see if you can remember which category they might have been in on the window in the pretty recent past.*

#### 1. Overton Window and the Open Boarder:

#### **Immigration And The Overton Window – Garrett Cunningham sept 2018**

Democrats have moved further left on the issue. Seemingly overnight, "Abolish ICE" has moved from Twitter hashtag to serious campaign material....

...Established in 2003 during the Bush Administration, the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) is a relatively new law enforcement agency in the Department of Homeland Security.

...According to Joseph Lehman, a colleague of Overton, politicians do not shift the window themselves, but detect its location and move with it (*this is I think an outdated or limited way to look at this. As we will see there are very recent cases of politicians coming out and saying radical things, I think specifically to open the overton window.*) In this way, the Overton window operates as a political feedback loop...

*This article starts talking about the media's family separation propaganda here...*

...immigration rhetoric generally would help shift the entire Overton window to the right, thus making Democratic policy more moderate. In reality, the window has widened. While Trump's administration pushes the immigration window to the right, some Democrats have simultaneously pushed the window to the left.

On the last weekend of June, nationwide immigration protests saw thousands brandishing signs to abolish ICE and condemn the family separation policy. Just a few days prior, the newest face of the Democratic Party, Democratic Socialist Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, unseated 10-term incumbent Joseph Crowley to win the Democratic nomination for the New York District 14 House seat. Among her progressive campaign policy is her plan to—you guessed it—abolish ICE.

...Ocasio-Cortez won her New York district by running to the left of Crowley on many issues. Other progressive Democrats also fared well against their establishment competitors who were generally more moderate on issues like immigration...

*It just goes on here to point out that instead of moving the window the democrats are widening it. The progressives are pushing it one way and the institutionalists are forced to stay in the middle. And ultimately dividing the leftists... this is interesting because it is a macro level of that the democratic primary race is about to do to their base as well... time will tell.*

## **2. The Overton Window and Socialism march 2019 – Elad Vaida**

...example as of late is the Green New Deal (GND). Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez likely knew that her plan to retrofit every single building in America, end all air travel, and eliminate the bane of cow flatulence was unrealistic and would never become law in the moment. Her fellow Democrats who support the GND likely knew this as well, which is why Sen. Chuck Schumer called Sen. Mitch McConnell's decision to bring the GND to a vote a "[political stunt](#)," and why Sen. Ed Markey [called](#) it "an attempt to sabotage the movement we are building." What they all knew was that the political climate was not yet ripe for the policies outlined in the GND. However, in positing it as an idea, their goal was to shift the frame of the window. Claiming the world will end in 12 years is meant to normalize a panicky discourse to get people used to the idea that change, any change, will be better than ultimate annihilation. Don't be surprised then if ten, fifteen, twenty years down the road, something like the GND may not only be law, but may seem tame compared to new policies being advocated by the left.

Finally, let's look at the use of the term "socialism" itself. Nine years ago, the Huffington Post caused an uproar by claiming that Obama should "[embrace the socialist label](#)." An American President identify as a socialist? Unthinkable! Yet despite this aversion, the left

succeeded in making socialism great again. Socialism is now openly discussed as a viable ideology. Congressional dinosaurs like Bernie Sanders and popular demagogues like AOC now proudly “embrace the socialist label.” Even more “moderate” (and I use the term very loosely) Democrats like Kamala Harris, who recently [claimed](#) she is “not a Democratic Socialist,” are now supporting openly socialist policies like ending all private healthcare.

### **3. The Overton Window and Free healthcare**

Bernie Moves The Overton Window On Single-Payer Chris Weigant 2016... *I think?*

*This article is a bit older...*

Single-payer healthcare started squarely in the “unthinkable” category, even for most Democrats. It was some wild-eyed lefty idea that would never become reality, or even be politely discussed among “Serious People” in Washington (when they hold their cocktail parties). As I pointed out earlier this week, it was only eighteen months ago that Hillary Clinton dismissed Bernie Sanders’s support for single-payer as “a theoretical debate about some better idea that will never, ever come to pass.” For Clinton, at the time, single-payer was definitely in the unthinkable category.

That wasn’t that long ago, it bears pointing out. Already, the idea has moved up one notch, to “radical.” By definition, people (even “Serious People”) are indeed thinking about it and offering up solid proposals for its implementation. More and more of the general public now agrees that the idea is actually “acceptable,” foreshadowing the next step on the Overton scale. Single-payer still has a few steps to go, of course. But Bernie’s plan may move it along the scale a lot faster than it would have without his Medicare For All bill. Remember, it wasn’t that long ago that the Democratic Party as a whole considered the idea unthinkable. Now, though, future movement to acceptable, sensible, and popular seems almost within reach.

*Already in just 2 years as you can see we have moved to the acceptable category on our window. Almost, I think Every Democrat running has or will have a version or take on this.*

### **4. Here is another older article about the then “radical idea” of universal basic income Bipartisan consensus for universal basic income – David Atkins 2014**

...universal basic income (UBI), which is still pretty far outside the Overton Window of mainstream political discourse (for now), but that is increasingly uniting both progressives and conservatives on the edges. A growing number of progressives have been calling for UBI as a response to globalization, mechanization and flattening of the labor force, and increasing inequality. After all, why roll Sisyphus’ stone up the hill of job protections when jobs themselves are becoming scarce and lower-paid for a wide variety of reasons, when

instead we could free up human dignity and creativity by not tying survival to having a “job” for a corporate overlord in the first place?

*...So this was written in the dystopian Obama years, where our president was wandering around West Virginia talking about “your jobs are not coming back” The declining of America and all this... So fast forward 5 years to a booming economy and the lowest unemployment numbers of, for all intents and purposes the history of the world. And we have 2020 presidential hopefuls, serious contenders...they say... out there making cases for UBI, and people are thinking and talking about it.*

*Earlier in the episode one of these articles, the overton window and immigration article stated that politicians don't move the window, traditionally... besides this AOC stuff... but the politicians don't get out there and say the radical things forcing the window up or down, they pin point the window and judge to see how far they can push it. So we are left with the question “How do these think tanks move the window?”*

*So this is from Real Clear Politics... which, I would say is pretty center. This article is huge and I am not reading this whole thing. But I do have some bits here:*

**Dossier-Tied Firm Pitches Reporters Daily on 'Collusion'** By [Paul Sperry](#)

*This firm uh... The Democratic Integrity Project...*

TDIP is led by Daniel J. Jones, a former FBI investigator, Clinton administration volunteer and top staffer to California Democratic Sen. Dianne Feinstein. It employs the key opposition-research figures behind the salacious and unverified dossier: Fusion GPS co-founder Glenn Simpson and ex-British intelligence officer Christopher Steele. Its financial backers include the actor/director Rob Reiner and billionaire activist George Soros.

The project's work has been largely shrouded in mystery. But a months-long examination by RealClearInvestigations, drawn from documents and more than a dozen interviews, found that the organization is running an elaborate media-influence operation that includes driving and shaping daily coverage of the Russia collusion theory, as well as pushing stories about Trump in the national media that attempt to tie the president or his associates to the Kremlin.

Five days a week, TDIP emails a newsletter to influential Democrats and prominent Beltway journalists under the heading “TDIP Research” – which summarizes the latest “collusion” news, and offers “points of interest” to inspire fresh stories regarding President Trump's alleged ties to Moscow.

Recipients of the TDIP reports include staffers at the New York Times and Washington Post and investigative reporters at BuzzFeed, ProPublica and McClatchy, as well as news producers at

CNN and MSNBC, according to a source familiar with the project's email distribution list. Democratic aides on Capitol Hill also subscribe to the newsletter.

The briefings typically run several pages and include an “Executive Summary” and links to court documents and congressional testimony, letters and memos, as well as new articles and videos.

*Five days a week... 5 days a week... just pulsing out this stuff. And the news, these journalists just turned around and used this as sort of copy and paste, like a press release. Despite the 2 ½ year 3 year investigation report stating unequivocally that there was absolutely no evidence of Russia collusion... according to Reuters*

**Despite report findings, almost half of Americans think Trump colluded with Russia:**  
**Reuters/Ipsos poll**  
*chris kahn march 26*

Nearly half of all Americans still believe President Donald Trump worked with Russia to interfere in the 2016 presidential election, according to a new Reuters/Ipsos poll conducted after Special Counsel Robert Mueller cleared Trump of that allegation.

*Hmmm. I wonder why?*