

## THE ROYAL DIVIDEND IN CONTEMPORARY INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

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**Abstract:** While the monarchical system of governance is often regarded by many political scientists and laypeople alike as a political arrangement that has outlived its usefulness and even as an aberration, the current features of the international system of states, especially when it comes to the emerging world order, which has been shaped, at least in part as a result of the foreign policy gambits of the second Trump administration, enables some states that retain their monarchies, even if their rulers function as essentially symbolic figureheads, to derive a number of somewhat unexpected advantages from it. The paper draws on a qualitative methodology, which is based on the synthesis and analysis of carefully chosen primary and secondary sources that fall within the scope of academic disciplines such as international relations, political science, sociology, and nationalism studies. Following a review of the literature, in which it looks at some of the historical factors explaining the durability of monarchies and the current status quo with regard to the place occupied within the international system by modern countries with monarchs as heads of state, it advances a two-fold argument. Firstly, it contends that monarchies, specifically constitutional monarchies, can mesh well with and bolster the liberal nationalism that is seeing a resurgence in the Western world, with the hereditary rulers of such states generally rather well-equipped to deliver messages of unity in times of crisis. Furthermore, in situations characterized by a high degree of political uncertainty, especially due to the actions of world powers, the institution of the monarchy can constitute an important safety valve, providing something akin to a psychological shield for regular citizens who feel vulnerable. Secondly, it argues that current monarchs, albeit often having relinquished actual political power, may nonetheless be rather well-positioned to navigate the often murky waters associated with Trump's style of foreign policy-making. In particular, it examines how the institution of the British monarchy that exhibits features, which appear to transcend the regular *modus operandi* of politics, has demonstrated somewhat of a deterrence effect when it comes to certain ambitious plans that are associated with the American expansionism under the Trump administration, which are of questionable legality from the standpoint of the law of nations. In essence, constitutional monarchies seem to be surprisingly versatile in terms of managing to remain in the good graces of both liberal and conservative political forces, demonstrating a remarkable adaptability to the pressures emanating from the new world order in which it appears increasingly difficult to speak of the continued existence of a united Western bloc.

**Keywords:** constitutional monarchy, liberal nationalism, soft power, Charles III, Donald Trump

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Monarchies constituted the default system of governance in the pre-modern era, which can be mainly attributed to their efficiency, relative to alternative forms of rule, (Gerring et al., 2021) in exercising political control, bringing together and allowing for better coordination in the case of large and diverse human populations (Singh, 2025) that occupied vast expanses of land, especially given that the means of transport and communication technologies were rather underdeveloped compared to the present day. (Gerring et al., 2021). In the modern age, monarchies have garnered praise by various political actors, such as Italian statesman Sidney Sonnino and British Prime Minister William Gladstone, due to often being regarded as visible symbols of the nation's unity that transcend political and social cleavages. In non-Western societies like Japan and India, the institution of the monarchy has sometimes been viewed as having anti-colonial overtones because of either being credited for helping preserve national independence or being invoked as having the potential to pave the way for a brighter future characterized by the creation of a unified state that will not be subservient to Western powers. (Banerjee, 2017) Similarly, within Europe itself, monarchies have been perceived as conducive to reasserting independence, as in the case of Norway following the country's dissolution of the union with Sweden in 1905 (The Northern Voices, 2025) or as a contributing factor with regard to national reconciliation, as personified by King Juan Carlos I of Spain who has been credited with helping Spanish citizens deal with bitter historical memories pertaining to the Spanish Civil War and Francisco Franco's regime. (Husar-Poliszuk, 2020) Monarchs have also occasionally brought about brief periods of more peaceful international relations courtesy of their cooperation with other royals, for instance as evidenced by the existence of the Metternich system during the "monarchical internationalist" period from 1815 to 1848. (Geyer & Paulmann, 2001) While the number of monarchies has seen a significant decline compared to their heyday in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, (Müller, 2023) more than 40 such systems of governance are still part of the political landscape today. (Afroz, 2025) Less than one third of them, located mainly in the Arab world, are governed by rulers with substantial or virtually unchecked political power, thus falling under the definition of absolute monarchies. Even though the human rights situation in these countries is quite problematic, the monarchs are frequently able to ensure a high standard of living for the population as a whole, especially in comparison to conventional autocratic regimes.

(Lawrence, 2023) There are also semi-constitutional monarchies, such as Liechtenstein, (Paynter & Prescott, 2024) in which the ruler's political authority is constrained by constitutional rules, but nevertheless the head of state is able to wield a large degree of political influence, (Anckar, 2021) for instance in terms of constitutional court appointments, as in the case of the small German-speaking principality. (Bertolini, 2024) One of the advantages enjoyed by monarchies, which explains their durability as a regime type, (Kailitz, 2013) concerns their general responsiveness to citizen demands for democratization. Moreover, the constitutional, ceremonial or "politically harmless" monarchies, (Kudin, 2026) such as those in the United Kingdom and the Scandinavian countries, offer a number of intangible benefits for their citizens, which warrant further examination. While the hard power of the European monarchs has seen a marked reduction over the course of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, their soft power has increased. (Rees, 2014) Nowadays monarchies can represent cultural industries, draw additional attention to a country's history, generate economic opportunities, for instance due to boosting tourism, and also frequently remain deeply etched into the national consciousness, helping solidify national identities. (Kudin, 2026) They can also elevate the public mood on a broad scale, causing regular citizens to feel unadulterated joy because of the splendour surrounding royal events like weddings, which temporarily enables them to escape the trappings of the sometimes monotonous activities that are part of daily life. (Duncan, 2019) In particular, in the case of the micro states, their very existence may be intricately connected to certain actions taken by monarchs at watershed moments in history, which means that the monarchy is often considered to be an indelible component of the identity of the countries in question, (Anckar, 2021) with the individual personality of the ruler shaping perceptions of state identity. (Bertolini, 2024) Monarchic concepts have also continued to be used as reference points in various "post-royal" societies (where there may be remnants of institutional structures associated with a monarchy or none at all). (Banerjee, 2017) Monarchies may also be well-poised with regard to helping regular citizens weather certain storms, as in the case of the COVID-19 pandemic. In particular, Western European and Northern European monarchs have been described as providing a "neutral focus of national loyalty" when a country is beset by a crisis, with the speeches delivered by royal figures such as Queen Elizabeth II of the UK and her Danish counterpart Margrethe II during the health emergency phase regarded as more authentic (Kjeldsen et al., 2023) and likely to fall on receptive ears than those of most politicians whose sincerity in advocating for strict restrictions was occasionally questioned due to their own past transgressions that had been out in the open, or because of suspicions of ideological biases influencing their decisions. Such royal messages of encouragement received widespread praise across Europe, (Morris & Hazell, 2020) and were even appraised as having the markings of a distinct genre. (Kjeldsen et al., 2023) In the case of Sweden, where in December 2020 King Carl XVI Gustaf in a rare public appearance, in front of the state broadcaster STV, seemed to take aim at the country's light touch approach to the COVID-19 pandemic, (Henley, 2020) it arguably served to provide some measure of empowerment to peripheral voices disagreeing with the authorities' anti-lockdown strategy. While there were undoubtedly other important factors at play, such as those related to culture and levels of social trust, it is unlikely to be entirely coincidental that monarchies in Northern Europe such as Norway and Denmark stood out for the level of their citizens' compliance with the pandemic control measures (Ihlen et al., 2022) and the overall effectiveness of their responses to the public health scare. In essence, given that at least in Europe, there appear to be few drawbacks and plenty of implicit benefits to retaining the monarchy as an institution, it is thus hardly surprising that over the course of the last decades European monarchies have not had to contend with any influential social movements calling for the outright abolition of the institution (The Northern Voices, 2025) and retain the support of more than 50% of citizens in virtually all countries across the continent. (Brussels Times, 2023)

## **2. MATERIALS AND METHODS**

The paper employs qualitative research, building on the existing literature that covers the current state-of-the-art with regard to the ways in which royal figures don certain political mantles. It strives to evaluate the strengths of the arguments favouring monarchical systems of governance by looking at the ways in which the latter defend core national interests and pursue public diplomacy. New insights are generated (Elsbach & Van Knippenberg, 2020) by examining the degree to which there is a fit between the existing theories and conceptual frameworks, on the one hand, and the current realities on the ground, on the other. The integrative literature review doubles down as an introduction to the article and sets the stage for the subsequent analysis that revolves around the unique niche carved out by certain monarchies in the Trumpian era of international relations. While there is no explicit attempt to engage in prognostication, some of the patterns identified appear quite likely to persist across time and space.

## **3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

Critics of the monarchy as an institution frequently emphasize its history as an oppressive system of governance, with its rule by genetics perceived as intrinsically non-meritocratic, (Afroz, 2025) and in the case of the contemporary constitutional monarchies, the sway they hold over public life has been associated with extravagance, unnecessary economic expenditures, and a continued entrenchment of social inequality. (Singh,

2025) Nonetheless, monarchies, specifically constitutional monarchies, appear to possess a number of distinctive characteristics, which offer them certain comparative advantages relative to their non-monarchical counterparts in the international system. As a result of the generally more unpredictable international environment since the early 2020s, in general, and aggressive foreign policy proposals reflective of an expansionist agenda by the Trump administration, in particular, nationalism, albeit considered to be primarily of the liberal variety, has flourished in Western countries like Canada, (Pacific, 2026) where the Liberal Party, against the initial odds that predicted a Conservative landslide win, rode the wave of a reinvigorated Canadian nationalism (Smith, 2025) and secured a victory in the federal election held on 28 April 2025. This “shifting baseline syndrome” in the Western world regarding the public expression of nationalist sentiments (Gordon, 2026) and the renewed popularity of nationalism as a whole have also been attributable to the valiant efforts demonstrated by the Ukrainians in their fight to preserve their sovereignty following the start of Russia’s full-scale invasion of the country on 24 February 2022. (Hannan, 2022) On 10 September 2026, Canada (one of Ukraine’s staunchest supporters since the beginning of the Russo-Ukrainian war) and Ukraine signed a One-Hundred-Year partnership agreement. Constitutional monarchies, courtesy of their happy mix of attachment to tradition and openness to adopting new practices, often hold a special appeal to both liberal and conservative forces. They are thus very much in their element when it comes to the blend between nationalism and liberalism that, as stated above, is once again becoming in vogue in certain Western countries. For instance, the British monarchy has been able to adjust to the influx of social and technological changes, but at the same time has managed to preserve its core role, being widely recognized as essentially the same institution as the one it was in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. (Osborne, 2026) Also, the monarchical form of governance has an innately primordialist appeal to members of the ethnic majority group, with support for it notably weaker among ethnic minorities in the United Kingdom, (British Future, 2023) while in the case of a number of countries that are part of the Commonwealth of Nations, such as Canada, Australia, and New Zealand, an unwillingness to break up with the monarchy can in part be understood as a nationalist reaction to growing ethnic diversity and corresponding perceptions of cultural threat. (Dufresne et al., 2022) Still, monarchies have the potential to construct a shared civic identity and pave the way for a mostly post-racial society, with King Charles III emphasizing that the Crown can act as a bridge between British citizens of different ethnic backgrounds and religious traditions. (British Future, 2023) In relation to the notion of liberal nationalism, the existence of a monarchy can also offer an unexpected psychological safety valve in situations when revisionist countries threaten the territorial integrity of a small state or a middle power. According to a Lord Ashcroft poll that was made public just prior to the coronation of King Charles and his wife Queen Camilla in May 2023, only 23% of Canadians stated that they would vote in favor of remaining a monarchy if a referendum was to be held, among the lowest when it came to Commonwealth realms. However, polling data from Pollara Strategic Insights, just two years later, revealed that there was a statistically significant increase in the popularity of Charles III as an individual and the monarchy as an institution (with 45% wanting the country to keep the Crown), which was to a large extent attributable to Trump’s remarks suggesting that Canada could end up as the “51<sup>st</sup> US state”. (Tasker, 2025) Becoming a republic had suddenly lost its appeal for many Canadians, as this would appear to remove one additional constitutional hurdle to potentially merging with the United States. (Luce, 2025) Curiously, the perception that being part of a monarchical system of governance is akin to a safety net when it comes to the potential shift from rhetorical to real life predations on a country’s sovereignty, has also found its way to the other side of the Atlantic Ocean. A 2026 RTL poll in the Netherlands revealed that support for the country remaining a monarchy had increased in comparison to 2023, with a number of respondents explicitly stating that they were now lukewarm when it came to the prospect of their country adopting a republican form of governance and having to elect a president, expressing a belief that the presence of a King is a strong guarantee that a “type like Trump” could not become the head of state. (NL Times, 2026)

In addition to being quite attuned to some of the social and political trends in their own countries, monarchs also appear to be rather well-equipped to deal with the new Trumpian world order, which a number of analysts depict as already having the markings of a post-Western one (Acharya, 2025) and also describe as neo-royalist, due to leaders of great powers (akin to rival royal houses) and hyper-capitalists being in a rather good spot in terms of making deals beneficial for themselves with little regard for the preferences of the small states and middle powers. (Goddard & Newman, 2025) According to Ross McDermott, a professor of international relations, systemic models of change, while not necessarily lacking explanatory value, do not do justice to the full picture in terms of enhancing our understanding of current geopolitical developments, with the 2020s illustrative of how individual personalities such as Vladimir Putin and Donald Trump, who have either created personalist forms of power or strive to do so, are actively shaping the course of history. (McDermott, 2026) It is not uncommon for such influential political figures to disregard diplomatic protocol and make policy decisions in an almost whimsical fashion rather than as a result of long-term strategic thinking, which is certainly par for the course with the US president. It is worth noting that in the case of Trump, his fascination with royalty, especially British royalty, has long preceded his entry into politics (Hurtado, 2026) and he has viewed the status of the royals as eclipsing even that of his own eponymous brand. (Burleigh, 2019) The US president’s life-long

interest in the institution of monarchy has also possibly played a part in what has been dubbed as a “monarchical understanding of presidential power” due to his ubiquitous use of executive orders. (Bouie, 2026) This admiration for royalty has extended to absolute monarchs in non-Western countries as well. In a break from his predecessors, Trump has started to abandon the longstanding US policy of democracy promotion, gradually shifting towards explicitly extolling the virtues of monarchy, describing it as the ideal form of government in the Middle East, by throwing down the gauntlet at previous US presidents for criticizing the monarchs regarding the way in which they ruled their countries. Tulsi Gabbard, the Director of National Intelligence, stated in a speech on 31 October 2025 that it was acceptable for the region’s countries to have hereditary rulers at the helm who were not necessarily committed to democracy or human rights. (Hunt, 2025) Trump’s predilections for spending time in the company of royals have not escaped the notice of British diplomats, with King Charles essentially assigned the task of repairing the fracturing Anglo-American alliance, especially in the context of the two countries’ pronounced disagreements regarding the ongoing war in Iran. (Marsh, 2026) Notably, Charles III and Queen Camilla made a state visit to the United States from 27 to 30 April 2026, with the British monarch’s handling of Trump subsequently receiving enthusiastic acclaim by the British public, (Coughlan, 2026) due to delivering a perfect mixture of praise for the US president, small doses of British humour, arguments as to why the United States should remain committed to NATO, resolute defense of the Ukrainian cause, which appeared to move even the Ukraine aid skeptic J.D. Vance, (Stanage, 2026) and subtle criticisms of certain US policies, such as those on climate change. (Lawless, 2026) Trump referred to Charles III as “the greatest king, in my book” and announced a removal of tariffs and restrictions on whisky imports from the UK, (Clayton, 2026) with British political commentators generally cautiously optimistic that the special relationship had been salvaged, at least in the short- to medium-term. (Widmer, 2026) According to British journalist Robert Hardman, the author of an upcoming book *Elizabeth II: In Private. In Public. The Inside Story*, who has had the opportunity to personally engage in conversations with the US president, Trump’s respect for King Charles and his realization that Canada does not stand on its own, but is actually part of the British Commonwealth may have indeed played a part in his decision to abandon his quest to annex Canadian territory just above the Canada-United States border. (Steven, 2026) The British King has since the beginning of Trump’s second term in office, notably following the highly contentious Trump-Zelenskyy White House meeting on 28 February 2025, also been quietly working behind the scenes to bridge the gap between the Ukrainians and the Americans, (Ducourtieux, 2025) specifically impressing upon Trump that Ukraine can prevail in the conflict. (Barnes & Furness, 2025) The King’s overall impact in terms of persuading Trump not to deviate from the Western consensus on Ukraine has arguably been more decisive than that of former “Trump whisperers” such as Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni, (Ghiglione, 2026) due to his continued ability to stay in Trump’s good graces. (Coughlan, 2025) As mentioned previously, Trump’s approach to diplomacy remains distinctly personal, preferring to deal with other leaders man-to-man, as long as he has a high degree of respect for them. (Westcott, 2026) The lack of real political power does not work to the detriment of most royal figures by lessening their standing, as Trump tends to eschew the traditional style of policy-making, has a tendency to go off script, and is frequently suspicious of professional politicians. In fact, due to not being responsible for defining political agendas and making difficult (as well as often unpopular) decisions, monarchs are in a good position to win the popularity contest against elected politicians. According to data from Morning Consult, titular rulers across Europe generally hold an approval advantage of close to 30 percentage points over national leaders such as prime ministers, (The European Correspondent, 2026) with an August Gallup 2023 poll revealing that King Charles had a higher favorability in the USA than virtually all American politicians. (Simon, 2023) Thus, in Trump’s mind monarchs (as well as autocrats like Putin enjoying seemingly remarkable levels of support compared to many Western politicians) appear to be higher up the social ladder than regular politicians such as Zelenskyy, who, while still popular, has seen a notable dip in his approval ratings compared to 2022, (Vigers & Ray, 2025) mainly due to the Ukrainians’ fatigue regarding the war (albeit the degree to which the Ukrainian president has lost support inside the country has been exaggerated by many politicians skeptical of the Ukrainian political establishment, including by the US commander-in-chief himself). (Stafford, 2025) Given that Trump frequently prioritizes optics and securing quick (as well as often merely symbolic) victories over the long-term impacts of political decisions, the US president is likely to attach a higher premium to the prestige psychology factor than the actual political power held by the monarch. Furthermore, due to not having to worry about reelection and toeing certain party lines, monarchs may also sometimes be more frank, authentic and prone to off-the-cuff remarks, which may enhance their appeal to Trump, as evidenced by the comments of King Charles, who during the state banquet with the US president in April 2026 joked about the 1814 Capture of Washington, which was well-received, as well as Spanish King Juan Carlos’ retort to Venezuelan president Hugo Chávez at the 2007 Ibero-American Summit - “¿Por qué no te callas?” (“Why don’t you shut up?”) - in response to the latter’s interruptions of the speech by Prime Minister José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero, who had defended the political legitimacy of his predecessor José María Aznar. (Husar-Poliszuk, 2020) Even though the Gulf monarchies are unlikely to be able to recreate the emotional pull of the British royal family, these states have nonetheless frequently drawn praise by the Trump administration (Schaer, 2025) and have been more

successful than many European Union allies of the USA in swaying certain foreign policy decisions of the US president, mainly in relation to the war in Iran. (Hilotin, 2026)

#### 4. CONCLUSION

The monarchy model, in its constitutional manifestation, shows no signs of disappearing in many Western and Northern European countries, as well as in other places around the world. Even though the executive powers of monarchs in Europe have been curtailed and they rarely take center stage when it comes to setting the tone for the discussions regarding the ways to tackle the important issues facing their countries, monarchies appear to possess certain asymmetric capabilities that enable them to exert the right type of influence in both domestic and international settings. By all accounts, they remain in a good position to appeal to both liberal and nationalist forces within their countries, contributing to the fostering of a spirit of national unity. Even more significantly, the fact that kings and queens do not fall into the category of ordinary political figures, with their exact prerogatives often unclear, especially from the perspective of foreign politicians, adds a certain mystical quality to them, allowing them to tap into a virtually limitless amount of soft power, which may serve them well in the Trumpian era of international relations where “great men” politics have made a strong comeback.

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