



# CURRENT ISSUES & EVENTS

 @UILCIANDE

**2025 • DISTRICT**

Feb. 14, 2025



PHOTO BY GAGE SKIDMORE

U.S. Sen. Marco Rubio, R-Florida, speaks with supporters at a campaign rally in 2016. Rubio was sworn in as the 72nd secretary of state on Jan. 21, 2025, and his first international trip was to El Salvador, Guatemala, Costa Rica, Panama and the Dominican Republic.

**DO NOT TURN THIS PAGE UNTIL YOU ARE INSTRUCTED TO DO SO!**

UNIVERSITY INTERSCHOLASTIC LEAGUE

# **CURRENT ISSUES & EVENTS**

## **DISTRICT • 2025**

1. **What social media platform unveiled changes to improve children's safety online including making accounts of users younger than 18 private by default and silencing notifications to minors from 10 p.m. to 7 a.m.?**
  - a. X
  - b. TikTok
  - c. Instagram
  - d. Snapchat
2. **While crediting spending that has ramped up collection enforcement through the climate, health care and tax package signed into law in 2022, Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen and IRS Commissioner Danny Werfel traveled to Austin in September to announce that the IRS collected \$1.3 billion from what group?**
  - a. ordinary Americans
  - b. ultra rich people including Elon Musk and Michael Dell
  - c. high-wealth individuals who have failed to pay their tax debts
  - d. tech companies including Microsoft, Amazon, Uber and Airbnb
3. **The theft of approximately 100,000 eggs from the back of a distribution trailer was attributed to the scarcity of eggs. Why were eggs becoming scarce?**
  - a. the closure of the U.S. Food and Drug Administration that inspects eggs
  - b. avian flu outbreak that has killed millions of egg-laying hens
  - c. increased overseas demand from countries such as India and China
  - d. tariffs imposed on Mexico, which has the highest per capita egg consumption in the world
4. **NASA's largest planetary spacecraft launched on a 5.5-year, 1.8 billion-mile voyage Oct. 14. It's mission was to study what, arriving in 2030?**
  - a. water on Mars
  - b. comet Tsuchinshan-ATLAS
  - c. Jupiter's moon Europa
  - d. 486958 Arrokoth in the Kuiper belt
5. **Jan. 29 marked the beginning of the Lunar New Year, one of the most important festivals in many Asian countries, including Vietnam, China and the Asian diaspora. In the Chinese zodiac associated with this year, 2025 is the year of what?**
  - a. rat
  - b. horse
  - c. snake
  - d. dragon
6. **U.S. President Donald Trump signed an executive order declaring that the U.S. should no longer grant automatic citizenship to babies born in the country, an apparent contradiction of which amendment of the Constitution?**
  - a. 14th Amendment
  - b. 18th Amendment
  - c. 24th Amendment
  - d. 27th Amendment

7. **Alcohol is a leading preventable cause of cancer, contributing to 100,000 cancer cases and 20,000 related deaths each year. On Jan. 3, what did Surgeon General Dr. Vivek Murthy say about alcohol?**
  - a. Alcohol should be banned in accordance with the 18th Amendment to the Constitution.
  - b. Alcohol should have a 100% tariff on it with proceeds going to health care.
  - c. The Federal Uniform Drinking Age Act should be amended to make the minimum drinking age 25.
  - d. Alcoholic beverages should carry a warning label as packs of cigarettes do.
8. **Appearing on the Great Seal of the United States — used on U.S. documents since 1782 — what has been a national emblem in the U.S. for years but wasn't official until President Joe Biden signed a law on Christmas Eve?**
  - a. Red, white, and blue — and very specific ones at that — are now officially the national colors.
  - b. The turkey is the official fowl — game bird.
  - c. The bison is the official mammal after Congress passed the National Bison Legacy Act.
  - d. The bald eagle is now officially the national bird.
9. **Giving them a slim three-seat majority in the House, how many seats did Republicans control in the U.S. House of Representatives?**
  - a. 53
  - b. 150
  - c. 218
  - d. 273
10. **In November, Republicans elected a fourth-term senator as the next Senate majority leader, completing a momentous shift in Republican leadership. Who?**
  - a. Mitch McConnell of Kentucky
  - b. John Cornyn of Texas
  - c. Rick Scott of Florida
  - d. John Thune of South Dakota
11. **The Air Quality Index shot up to 499 in some places in November, labeled as “hazardous” and well above the 300-mark that led the government to impose emergency measures. Where?**
  - a. Lahore, Pakistan
  - b. Delhi, India
  - c. Brits, South Africa
  - d. Falls Church, Virginia
12. **What country's foreign minister said he was barring U.N. Secretary-General Antonio Guterres from entering his country because Guterres had not “unequivocally” condemned a missile attack on his country?**
  - a. Iran
  - b. Syria
  - c. Lebanon
  - d. Israel
13. **In a remarkable milestone for an experimental financial asset that had once been mocked as a sideshow and a fad, the price of a single bitcoin hit a milestone in early December. What?**
  - a. The price of a single bitcoin rose to more than \$100,000.
  - b. Cryptocurrency fanatics purchased 10,000 coins.
  - c. A federal appeals court ruled bitcoin was legal currency.
  - d. The value of all bitcoin circulation is \$33 trillion, about equivalent to the U.S. national debt.

14. **At least 14 people were killed and dozens more injured in the early hours of New Year's Day when a 42-year-old U.S. Army veteran from Texas drove a pickup truck into crowds. Where?**
- Las Vegas, Nevada
  - Magdeburg, Germany
  - New Orleans, Louisiana
  - Prague, Czech Republic
15. **As part of a first-of-its-kind plan in the U.S., most drivers will have to pay \$9 to enter the busiest part of Manhattan. London, Stockholm, Milan and Singapore already have it, but New York is the first U.S. city to adopt what?**
- automobile emission tariffs
  - passenger vehicle registration for Uber/Lyft drivers
  - city-approved identification
  - congestion pricing
16. **In the deadliest plane crash in the U.S. since 2001, there were no survivors after what happened to an American Airlines regional jet in the Washington, D.C., area?**
- It collided with a U.S. Army Black Hawk helicopter.
  - It experienced mechanical failure and crashed upon takeoff.
  - Ice on the wing caused a loss of lift and the plane hit a bridge over the Potomac.
  - Structural failure and separation of vertical stabilizer caused by pilot error led to loss of control and crash on landing.
17. **DeepSeek is an AI assistant from a Chinese startup that's upended the artificial intelligence space. What happened in relation to DeepSeek Jan. 27?**
- It announced a merger with ChatGPT.
  - It wiped almost \$600 billion from chipmaker Nvidia's market value and caused a 3% drop in the NASDAQ.
  - It forecast 10% tariffs on Chinese technology goods imported into the U.S.
  - It dropped from its top spot as the most downloaded free app on Apple's U.S. app store and the Google Store.
18. **In his final address in the Oval Office, what did President Joe Biden warn Americans of?**
- that social media and tech companies need to function in a free economy without accountability
  - that the free press no longer plays an important role in our society
  - that artificial intelligence originating in China needs to be banned
  - that an "oligarchy" of the ultrawealthy was threatening democracy
19. **In a news conference at Mar-a-Lago, U.S. President-elect Donald Trump expressed a desire to rename the Gulf of Mexico. What name did he say had a "beautiful ring" to it?**
- Bay of the Americas
  - Gulf of America
  - American Mediterranean Sea
  - Whatagulf
20. **Google said its computer, based on a computer chip called Willow, needed less than five minutes to perform a mathematical calculation that one of the world's most powerful supercomputers could not complete in 10 septillion years. What kind of computer is it?**
- the artificial intelligence machine
  - a quantum computer
  - a Turing machine
  - ENIAC

21. **Over the Nov. 22-24 weekend, director Jon M. Chu’s movie opened to an estimated \$114 million domestically, the biggest box office launch of all time for a Broadway adaptation. What movie?**
  - a. “Gladiator II”
  - b. “Wicked”
  - c. “Mufasa”
  - d. “West Side Story”
22. **The small Arab state was added in 2024 and is the only country in the Gulf region on the list. What country has been added to the U.S. Visa Waiver Program, meaning citizens of both countries can visit the other visa-free?**
  - a. Qatar
  - b. Ukraine
  - c. Israel
  - d. Brunei
23. **French Prime Minister François Bayrou survived three no-confidence votes, all falling far below the 289 threshold needed to pass. Far-left lawmakers had introduced the no-confidence motions against the prime minister after he did what?**
  - a. dissolved parliament and appointed successors who would be loyal to President Emmanuel Macron
  - b. withdrew from the European Union
  - c. invoked special constitutional powers to force through the 2025 budget
  - d. dissolved the Ministry of Armed Forces of France to create a new military system
24. **Saying online safety was one of parents’ toughest challenges, Australia’s communications minister introduced a world-first law into Parliament that would ban children under 16 from what?**
  - a. possessing cellphones
  - b. driving a motorized vehicle
  - c. staying out after a 10 p.m. curfew
  - d. using social media
25. **President Joe Biden commuted the sentences of roughly 1,500 people in December 2024. Which of the following was true?**
  - a. The 1,500 are now in the country’s most secure prisons but had been placed on home confinement during the coronavirus pandemic.
  - b. Biden included 39 Americans convicted of violent crimes.
  - c. Together with the pardons and commutations on Jan. 17, 2025, it gave Biden the record for most individual pardons and commutations issued.
  - d. Biden said the broad pardon included his son Hunter who had been convicted of tax crimes and sentenced to home confinement for three years.
26. **The leadership of Southern Methodist University changed its articles of incorporation and declared that its board of trustees was the “ultimate authority” over the university, not the United Methodist Church. What was at the crux of the litigation and split?**
  - a. anti-LGBTQ+ policies
  - b. new fees from the Southern Conference of the United Methodist Church
  - c. a desire to join the Southern Baptist Convention
  - d. a move to ban books in church-affiliated school libraries

27. **Jimmy Carter, the 39th president of the United States, died at 100 on Dec. 29 at his home in Plains, Georgia. Which of the following was NOT true of Carter?**
  - a. His wife was an advocate for mental health care.
  - b. He was a two-term president.
  - c. He was a peanut farmer.
  - d. His Camp David accords brought together Israel and Egypt.
28. **“I intend to resign as party leader, as prime minister, after the party selects its new leader,” Justin Trudeau, the 53-year-old ruling Liberal Party leader announced in January. He served as prime minister of what country for nine years?**
  - a. Mexico
  - b. the Bahamas
  - c. New Zealand
  - d. Canada
29. **The message said, “Sorry, TikTok isn’t available right now.” Why did users trying to use the popular video sharing application get that message Jan. 19?**
  - a. U.S. President Joe Biden blocked the app for security concerns on his last day in office.
  - b. U.S. President Donald Trump blocked the app for security concerns on his first day in office.
  - c. The Supreme Court ordered the app to cease operations because of First Amendment violations.
  - d. In April of 2024, Congress passed the ban as part of a \$95 billion package that provided foreign aid to Ukraine and Israel.
30. **Given that it was a life-threatening situation, the National Weather Service in Amarillo issued the first warning of what type for the region Jan. 20?**
  - a. snow squall warning
  - b. fire smoke warning
  - c. winter weather warning
  - d. blizzard warning
31. **In just the second time in history that a vice president has broken a tie for a Cabinet nominee, Vice President JD Vance cast the 51-50 tie-breaking vote for the approval of which Cabinet nominee in January?**
  - a. Marco Rubio as secretary of State
  - b. Pete Hegseth as secretary of the Department of Defense
  - c. Kristi Noem as secretary of Homeland Security
  - d. Scott Bessent as secretary of Treasury
32. **Upending a tradition of power sharing that had been in place since the 1970s, what action did the Texas Legislature take?**
  - a. Both houses of the Texas Legislature voted to require that all legislation be approved by two-thirds vote.
  - b. The House voted to ban members of the minority party from leading committees.
  - c. The Senate passed a rule stating that Democrats cannot participate in floor discussion.
  - d. The House leadership passed a resolution asking for a recall of Lt. Gov. Dan Patrick.
33. **Former U.S. Senator Bob Menendez was sentenced to 11 years in prison for what?**
  - a. taking bribes including gold bars in exchange for favors for Egypt and New Jersey businessmen
  - b. defamation of two Georgia election workers
  - c. felony charges of identity theft and wire fraud
  - d. misdemeanor of falsely pulling a fire alarm

34. **Argentina’s presidential office accused what organization of causing economic damage during the COVID pandemic by “(promoting) endless quarantines” and pulled out of the organization, following America’s lead?**
- World Health Organization, WHO
  - United States Agency for International Development, USAID
  - The Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality, AHRQ
  - UNICEF, originally the United Nations International Children’s Emergency Fund, officially United Nations Children’s Fund since 1953
35. **Every year, the Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists issues an update on its Doomsday Clock, which tracks humanity’s distance from disaster. What action did they take this year?**
- They made the clock the closest ever to midnight.
  - This year, the group moved the clock 10 seconds closer to midnight.
  - They made the clock move to 89 minutes to midnight.
  - They made no change.
36. **In its first admission of wrongdoing, Rupert Murdoch’s British newspaper wing, News UK, offered a “full and unequivocal apology” to Prince Harry for what?**
- violating copyright by printing parts of Princess Diana’s diary
  - inciting to riot after Prince Harry’s election was found to be illegal
  - unlawful intrusions on his privacy from 1996 to 2011
  - intentional and malicious defamation
37. **The wildfires that burned in and around Los Angeles were the most destructive in the region’s history. They razed neighborhoods, killed at least 24 people and forced desperate evacuations. What event exacerbated the fires?**
- high Santa Ana winds
  - hurricane Oscar
  - diversion of water from the Colorado River
  - a record low snowfall in the San Gabriel Mountains
38. **Forming the world’s third-largest automaker by sales as the industry transitions away from fossil fuels, what two companies announced plans to merge then, in February, ditched the idea?**
- Japan’s Toyota Motor Corp. and Germany’s Volkswagen AG
  - America’s Ford and Stellantis
  - Japanese automakers Honda and Nissan
  - The German automakers Volkswagen and Mercedes-Benz
39. **The price of futures of what common commodity hit a record high of \$4.30 per pound in mid-February, more than a 7% increase since the price hit over \$4 about a week earlier, the first time ever reaching that peak?**
- Frozen orange juice
  - Coffee
  - Lithium
  - Soybeans
40. **While Elon Musk’s job title with the federal government apparently is “unlisted,” what is his classification, a classification that allows him to work for 130 days a year?**
- senior executive service
  - DOGE chairman
  - technoking
  - special government employee

## THE ESSAY

**NOTE:** *Contestants who do not write an essay will be disqualified.* Essay length is not a major grading factor as long as the essay is substantial and demonstrates a sincere effort to discuss the assigned topic. Cover as many corners of the issue as practical, including historical, political, economic, social and cultural, when relevant. Avoid including your personal opinions, as more than enough information on the subject has been published.

**A focused, concise and specific essay beats a vague and rambling essay.**

## PROMPT

Since August 2024, the global political landscape has experienced significant upheaval, marked by leadership changes, electoral surprises and shifts in governance. Pick three countries outside the United States and discuss key changes in the leadership of those countries as well as the social, political, economic, cultural and scientific implications of the changes.



**DO NOT DISTRIBUTE TO STUDENTS BEFORE OR DURING THE CONTEST!**

# ANSWER KEY

POTENTIAL DISCUSSION POINTS PREPARED Jan. 6, 2025  
might include, but should not be limited to...

Since August 2024, the global political landscape has experienced significant upheaval, marked by leadership changes, electoral surprises and shifts in governance. Pick three countries outside the United States and discuss key changes in the leadership of those countries as well as the social, political, economic, cultural and scientific implications of the changes.

- |       |       |
|-------|-------|
| 1. C  | 21. B |
| 2. C  | 22. A |
| 3. B  | 23. C |
| 4. C  | 24. D |
| 5. C  | 25. C |
| 6. A  | 26. A |
| 7. D  | 27. B |
| 8. D  | 28. D |
| 9. C  | 29. D |
| 10. D | 30. A |
| 11. B | 31. B |
| 12. D | 32. B |
| 13. A | 33. A |
| 14. C | 34. A |
| 15. D | 35. A |
| 16. A | 36. C |
| 17. B | 37. A |
| 18. D | 38. C |
| 19. B | 39. B |
| 20. B | 40. D |

- *Mexico:* Claudia Sheinbaum took the oath of office in October as Mexico's first female president in more than 200 years of independence, promising to protect an expanded social safety net and other popular policies put in place by her predecessor, but facing pressing problems. The 62-year-old scientist-turned-politician receives a country with a number of immediate challenges, foremost among them stubbornly high levels of violence and a sluggish economy. She has reacted to U.S. President Donald Trump's 25% tariffs imposed on Mexico noting that Mexico GDP could fall 4% in 2025 in response to the tariffs.
- *Canada:* Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau's Liberal Party finds itself in search of a new leader while dealing with U.S. President Donald Trump's threats to impose steep tariffs on Canadian goods and with Canada's election just months away. Trudeau announced his resignation after facing an increasing loss of support both within his party and in the country as well as Trump's comments about Canada, suggesting it could become the 51st state. An election could be called as early as late March.
- *Syria:* In December 2024, Islamist guerrillas overthrew President Bashar al-Assad, ending the Assad family's 50-year rule and some 13 years of civil war. Bashar al-Assad's defeat is the strategic defeat of Russia and Iran in the Eastern Mediterranean. This development has created a power vacuum, raising concerns about the country's future stability and the potential for increased regional tensions. The opposition forces inside and outside the country have some experience in governance, but they do not know how to govern in harmony with one another.
- *Germany:* The German government collapsed as Chancellor Olaf Scholz lost a confidence vote in Parliament, deepening a crisis of leadership across Europe at a time of mounting economic and security challenges. And now, Europe's largest economy will be in the hands of a caretaker government, ahead of elections early next year. German lawmakers voted to dissolve the existing government by a vote of 394 to 207, with 116 abstaining. Coming just nine months before parliamentary elections had been scheduled to happen, the vote was an extraordinary moment for Germany. The elections, expected at the time this test was written, on Feb. 23, will be only the fourth snap election in the 75 years since the modern state was founded. The moment reflects a new era of more fractious and unstable politics in a country long known for durable coalitions built on consensus.
- *France:* French lawmakers passed a no-confidence vote against the government, throwing the European Union's second-biggest economic power deeper into a crisis that threatens its capacity to legislate and tame a massive budget deficit. Far-right and left-wing lawmakers joined forces to back a no-confidence motion against Prime Minister Michel Barnier, with a majority 331 votes in support of the motion. Barnier and his government's three-month tenure was the shortest lived in France's Fifth Republic beginning in 1958. Barnier resigned in early December, and French President Emmanuel Macron said he would appoint a new prime minister in the coming days whose top priority will be getting a 2025 budget adopted by parliament.
- *South Korea:* South Korea was plunged into political chaos after President Yoon Suk Yeol's aborted attempt to declare martial law, which sparked a fierce backlash and mounting pressure for him to step down. Six opposition parties submitted a bill calling for Yoon's impeachment. The main opposition Democratic Party, meanwhile, said it had begun formalizing treason charge plans against the president, as well as the defense and interior ministers. The country's largest union group said members would strike until the president quits, and protesters are echoing the widespread demands for him to resign. Yoon's defense minister, chief of staff and other top officials have submitted their resignations.
- *Bangladesh:* Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina resigned in August 2024 amid mass protests and political unrest, leading to the formation of an interim government tasked with new elections in late 2025.
- *Botswana:* The opposition ended the Botswana Democratic Party's 58-year rule amid economic decline and rising youth unemployment. Botswana's President Mokgweetsi Masisi conceded defeat. Analysts said that mounting socio-economic grievances, particularly among young people, were the downfall of the ruling party, which has governed the small southern African state since independence from Britain in 1966. Botswana has largely depended on its diamonds for income, but a downturn in the global diamond market caused economic growth to plummet this year, while unemployment rose to 28%.
- *South Africa:* South Africa's African National Congress lost its majority, resulting in a coalition government. Namibia elected its first female president, Netumbo Nandi-Ndaitwah of South West Africa People's Organization, though the party barely maintained its parliamentary majority. Nandi-Ndaitwah, who won 57.31% of the presidential vote, led SWAPO, which has governed Namibia for more than three decades, since independence. SWAPO won 51 out of 96 seats in Parliament, a decrease from the 63 seats it won in the 2019 election. The lost seats were most likely a reflection of widespread frustration with the country's stagnant economy.