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What the 2026 Oscars revealed about the current political mood in Hollywood

The 2026 Oscars exposed Hollywood's complex political landscape: while films boldly addressed social issues, filmmakers remained surprisingly silent during acceptance speeches, revealing an industry caught between artistic activism and fear of potential professional repercussions.

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The 2026 Academy Awards revealed a striking contradiction. Many of the winning films grapple with urgent contemporary issues, or difficult questions of historical memory. Yet their makers avoided following up on that political character in their acceptance speeches.

This paradox is revealing of the current political mood in [Hollywood](#): filmmakers are willing to engage with politics in their work, but reluctant to raise their own voices.

It makes for a puzzling irony that contrasts with the attitude of, for instance, [the music industry in the Grammy Awards](#). In a year of tariffs, Epstein files, US Immigration and Customs Enforcement (Ice) shootings and military interventions in Venezuela and Iran, the show's host, comedian Conan O'Brien, kept the political references contained to harmless jokes.

For instance, O'Brien mentioned the tighter security for the gala, appearing to reference the [FBI's warning of possible drone attacks against the US west coast](#). But the nod quickly revealed

itself as a pun about actor Timothée Chalamet's [recent declaration](#) that "no one cares" about ballet and opera.

Even some of the more political speeches, such as Michael B. Jordan's mention of the Black actors that preceded him when accepting the best actor Oscar, kept to industry boundaries.

Michael B. Jordan's acceptance speech mentioned the Black actors he felt pathed the way for him.

Only comedian Jimmy Kimmel, whose show Jimmy Kimmel Live! has become strongly critical of President Donald Trump, obliquely mentioned his looming presence [when presenting the best feature documentary award](#).

Politics of the nominated films

This attitude is glaringly detached from what this year's nominees communicate in their films.

[Bugonia](#), directed by Yorgos Lanthimos, poked at conspiracy theories through its kidnapping plot. The constant ping-pong hustle of [Marty Supreme](#) returned to the foundational moment of US capitalism in the 1950s and pointed out that it was already rotten way before Reaganomics and Trump. [The Secret Agent](#), meanwhile, set its thriller story against the historical memory of the dictatorship in Brazil.

The two main winners of the night were also the most political films. Joyfully disguised behind the vampire film conventions and musical performances of Sinners lies a condemnation of ongoing racism in the US. But the film also proposes blues music as an alternative way to experience the world and create loving and protective connections between its inhabitants.

In this sense, Delroy Lindo's performance as ageing blues singer Delta Slim centres the political core of the film. His retelling of a friend's murder by lynching is first a lament, then rhythm and finally blues.

Lindo competed for best supporting actor against Sean Penn, whose winning work in One Battle After Another became relevant when it started [to overlap with the media presence of Greg Bovino](#), commander-at-large of the US Border Patrol. Under Bovino's command [two US citizens were shot by Ice](#) in Minneapolis in January.

Paul Thomas Anderson wins best director for One Battle After Another.

One Battle After Another recaptures the political spirit of 1970s US films such as *The Three Days of the Condor* (1975), *Network* (1976) and *All the President's Men* (1976). These films reacted against the consequences of the Vietnam War and President Richard Nixon's resignation in the 1970s. *One Battle After Another* brings to the present their activist attitude to oppose our contemporary political challenges.

The film's chilling depiction of state violence against its own citizens connected with the events in Minneapolis and showed how relevant cinema can be when aimed at those in power. But the film had to speak for itself: its director, writer and producer, Paul Thomas Anderson, carefully avoided any direct mention of Trump, ICE or Minneapolis in his three acceptance speeches (for best adapted screenplay, director and film). And Sean Penn, whose political activism [as a friend of Hugo Chávez](#) or [in favour of Ukraine](#) has often made Hollywood uncomfortable, chose not to attend the ceremony.

Why nominees stayed silent

The reasons for the lack of politics at the awards may be found in the current industrial climate in the US. In September 2025, the Federal Communications Commission took *Jimmy Kimmel Live!* off the air for a few days, and [continues to threaten to do it again](#). [The industry chatter also believes Trump to be responsible](#) for CBS' decision to not renew *The Late Show* with Stephen Colbert, another critical outlet.

The possible acquisition, meanwhile, of [Warner Bros. by Paramount](#), presided over by Trump's ally David Ellison, follows Amazon's purchase of MGM and Disney buying Twentieth Century Fox. The industrial landscape is concentrating in a handful of technological tycoons. They may not take kindly to political activism when funding future projects.

The only political voice that was pointedly raised in the Oscars this year belonged to Spanish actor Javier Bardem.

Bardem appeared on stage to present the best international picture award sporting a lapel that said: "No a la Guerra" – no to war. He had worn the same lapel over 20 years ago when the Spanish Film Academy Awards in 2003 became a loud and clear indictment to Spain's involvement in the Iraq war.

Bardem left a clear message as he introduced the award: "No to war and Free Palestine." While films such as this year's extraordinary intake can and do speak for themselves, the gravity of the moment requires that those who make them join

with their own voices.

Bardem's dissonant appeal reveals where Hollywood's politics currently lie. They are caught between making committed films and a fear of what the country's politics will bring.

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