

FOURTEEN SHAMBOLIC YEARS OF CONSERVATIVE RULE

The Tories are Exhausting.

This Thursday the 4th of July the UK will be overcast in the low 60s with some intermittent rain, and all the parliamentary seats will be up for grabs as the UK turns out for yet another insane British snap election. This one was called by Rishi Sunak, the Almost Certainly About To Be Former Prime Minister of the UK.

Snap elections *as such* don't exist in the US. There are reasons for special elections to be called outside of the normal cycle, but they are extraordinary. A snap elections just means the



Prime Minister wants to have a go at it. And Rishi Sunak called one. He seems tired of being PM,

tired of Britain, maybe tired of life.

I'm going to explain roughly how these elections work, if you want to skip this part, that's understandable. Just scroll down to the picture of a kitten.

Elections are quite different in the UK than the

US. Eligible voters all over the four countries that make up the United Kingdom will head to the polls and vote for a local representative, sorted by party affiliation, one of which will be made their Member of Parliament. Many will just be voting for a party, rather than a person. Some local MPs are quite well known in their local constituencies, and well enough loved to carry votes from across the spectrum, but many are not. Similar to Congressional elections, a lot of people who vote a party line rather than for a person are trying to influence the shape of the national government, not just local representative business.

That's it, that's all they get to vote for in these national elections. In this way, it's much simpler than an American election.

There are 650 constituencies in the United Kingdom. The closest equivalent in America is probably Congressional districts. These constituencies are geographically contiguous and range from roughly 21,000 to 90,000 residents. There are sometimes accusations of gerrymandering in the UK, but it is strictly amateur stuff compared to the mathematical insanity of American redistricting.

Unlike America, the British don't vote for governmental roles. The people don't vote for the Prime Minister, at least not directly. Brits get one representative in the Parliament, and that's that. The various jobs, privileges, and positions get worked out when this particular mob of election winners show up at Westminster Palace in London.

Great Britain uses a first-past-the-post (FPTP) electoral system, or what Americans think of as just how elections work. There are many other ways of structuring voting, used in jurisdictions all over the world, but they remain mostly undiscovered in America and the UK. First-past-the-post is a system everyone gets one vote, one time, and the guy with the most votes wins. This style of voting tends to favor two party systems, low diversity in

political thought, and men. Voters are usually timid in FPTP systems – you pick a team and stick with it. If you want your vote to matter, you pick one of the two big teams. There's even a concept for this in Political Science: Duverger's law. Older democracies like America and the UK prefer FPTP because not much else had been discovered when they started trying to Democracy, and the politics around voting tends to be sticky. Criticizing the voting system often makes older people cranky in the traditional 'we had it bad, why should you have it any better' kind of way.

The UK doesn't have a written constitution. If you mention that to them, they will angrily say that yes, they do, and point at a giant pile of Post-It notes going back to the 17th century. Then they will also mention a few things that aren't written down and explain that it's fine because everyone knows those bits. Well, everyone *important*, at least.

(I am not going to describe the devolved governments or the House of Lords, this is already too long.)

Whoever leads the party which won more than half the seats will be invited by King Charles to form a government. A minority government can also be invited, with the "supply and confidence" of a smaller party. This was the case with Theresa May's government in 2017 which needed the assistance of the Northern Irish hard line Democratic Unionist Party to stay in government. But it's often unstable. See Theresa May's government in 2017.

The winners, now the government, sit on the right of the Speaker of the House of Commons. And the Opposition – the ones that didn't win the election – sit on the left. (Being the Speaker of the House of Commons is nothing like the Speaker of the House. The term is a false friend.) The job of Speaker of the House of Commons involves calling on MPs who want to talk, telling them when to vote, and shouting "Orrrrrdeh!" at grown-up politicians behaving

like an out of control middle-school classroom.

If no one party gets a majority, two parties can enter into a coalition to govern together, but they often fall apart – much like the House and Senate being at odds with each other and the President. (Though we just have to live with it for years, whereas the Brits can go back to the polls sooner with a snap election.)

The Prime Minister doesn't run for the office of PM; they're just another MP, technically. But they are generally the leader of their party. As for who gets what job, that's an internal party matter, and surprisingly little of it is formally legislated. (The party leadership elections are a whole different process which varies by party by-laws.) From there the PM tries to pass laws and create policy, with the usual drama that entails in modern democracies.

The PM can call for an election anytime, with the provision that he or she has to call for one within a five year term. And that's what Rishi Sunak did on May 22nd, when he called an election for this Thursday. He did this while trailing the opposition by about 20 points in the polls, which is just as much of a death sentence in the UK as the US. He called it while getting unceremoniously rained on, as if even the sky itself was saying "Nah, fuck this guy."

OK. Civics lesson over.

How it's Going? (Badly)



We all need this right now

To thank you for reading this, I have provided a kitten picture.

The Conservative Party, also known as the Tories, has been in power for 14 years. It will almost certainly be wiped out at the polls, possibly even out of meaningful existence, but *probably not*. Modern democratic Britain is a conservative, capital T- Tory, country. They spent nearly 60 years in power during the 20th century, and one of the longest lasting Labour PMs, Tony Blair, basically got the job by being a Tory in all but name. Britain *hates* the Tories because they continually crash the country into a wall, the same wall their faces are currently planted in now. But Brits *love* the Tories because Tories tell them that Britain is the best, and they shouldn't feel bad about the British Empire, and they can go it alone, because they're made of sterner stuff, and meant to be the best rich white people that rich white people can be, and like Lucy with the damn football, the Brits fall for it *every damn time*.

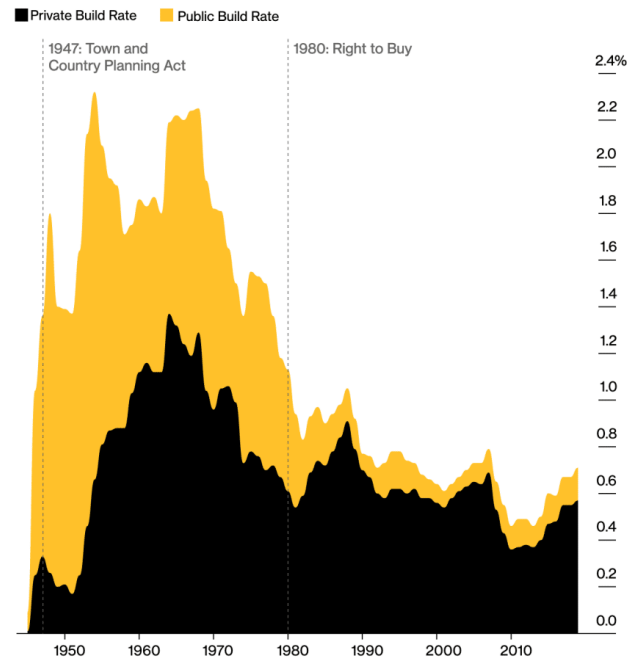
Right now in normal, not Tory-fantasy-land Great Britain, everything sucks.

Fuel poverty is skyrocketing, a record number of people are relying on food banks, companies are dumping raw sewage into almost every waterway in England. The National Health Service has more patients on waiting lists for medical care than

Ireland has people. The economy is trash, productivity has been flailing since the financial crisis, and the trains are barely running.

Britain Is Building Fewer Homes

New home completions as a share of total housing, by sector

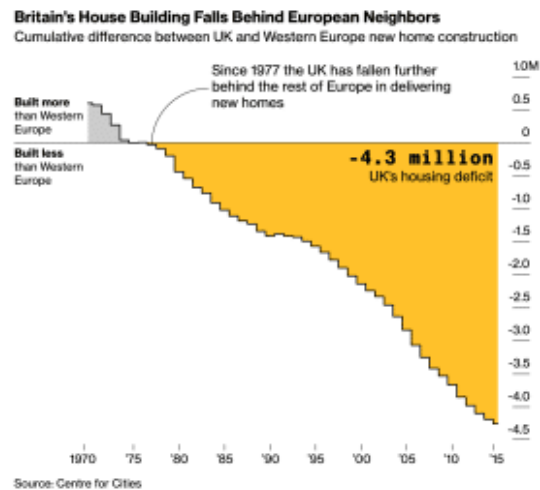


Source: UK Parliament House of Commons Library

Homelessness is becoming common, and young people despair of ever owning a house even as their rents balloon. The country is at least *1.2 million houses* behind what it needs.

House building hasn't kept up with population. One in every 26 houses needed by British families... doesn't exist. This drives house prices and rents up, but there's just no way to shelter people if there's no shelter. There are many reasons a particular person might be the one that become homeless, but that *someone* had to become homeless in the UK is simply math. The question of *is* not why people become homeless, we know why. The only question is *who* will become homeless – the ones left standing, when the music stops.

The prisons are overflowing, the police forces are undermanned. The buildings made with shitty RAAC (Reinforced autoclaved aerated concrete) are falling down piece by piece, including inside of over two hundred primary and secondary schools in the whole UK.

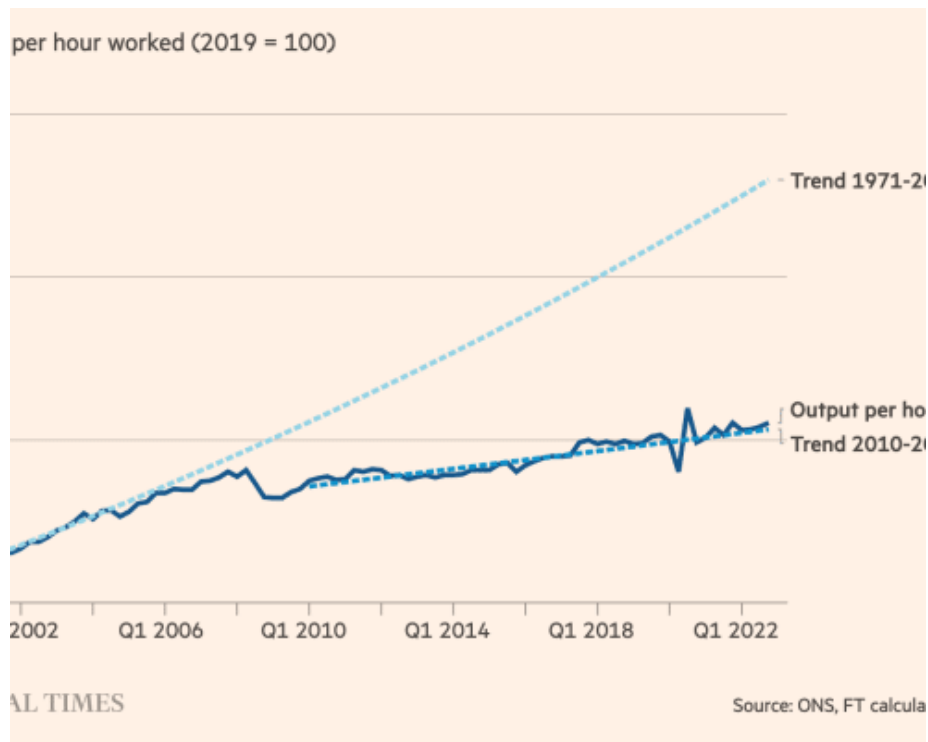


Compared to the European Neighborhood, the UK is doing even worst than its own estimations.

The chances of seeing a dentist are slightly better than winning a lottery, and people are pulling out teeth at home. There's not enough people to provide either childcare or eldercare, and not enough money to retain the people doing these jobs now. According to Tim Harford writing in the Financial Times, "Real household disposable income per capita has barely increased for 15 years," and "the deficit is a permanent fixture, and interest payments on public debt have risen to levels not seen for 40 years." Bigotry against trans people, nursed by the Conservatives, spans the political spectrum – perhaps a comforting distraction . The Tories would rather pay for flights to Rwanda for asylum seekers than pay their own NHS junior doctors.

And there's more, and more... a litany of failure, complaints, and human misery.

David Cameron



Falling relative productivity since the financial crisis.
This one's on Cameron, and his stupid austerity.



Truly these last 14 years of Tory rule have been like no other, but to understand this you have to understand David Cameron, Conservative Prime minister, 2010 to 2016. Cameron is the Simone Biles of failing up. No matter how much

he wrecked Great Britain, embarrassed himself, or both, he always stuck the landing like it was the easiest thing, like he meant to do it. He introduced Austerity to Britain after the 2009 financial crisis, and convinced his people to starve themselves half to death instead of trying to reform a corrupt banking system. He didn't take care of his people, he told them, "stiff upper lip!" and went back to one of his multi-million pound homes in the English countryside.

There was no good reason to do austerity, and every country that did suffered terribly as the economy slowed. But most of them had Austerity forced on them, Cameron forced it on his own

people. He then accidentally took the UK out of the EU when he didn't mean to, trying to show off after managing to barely not lose Scotland. No one thought he was insane enough to accidentally leave the EU when he didn't want to, but he was, and he didn't care. After that, he walked away from the job, literally singing a little song to himself, and ushered in years of Brexit chaos all of Europe is still trying to get over.

Cameron might have thought he was done failing up after all that, but then he was asked back by Sunak last year to become Foreign Secretary of the UK. But since he wasn't an MP, Sunak made him Baron Cameron of Chipping Norton, in the County of Oxfordshire. Now he's Lord Cameron, he even gets a little Santa-looking cape to wear in the House of Lords. That's all real things adult men did.

He recently fell for some Russian pranksters and talked about Ukraine policy with them because he thought they were the former Ukrainian president. I tried to check, but it's unclear if this was a video call.

Theresa May



Cameron was succeed by Theresa May, the first Prime Minister to be eaten by Brexit and her own Tory MPs on the back

benches of Parliament. She discovered quickly that a clean exit from the EU that involved taking a large chunk of the island next to Britain was impossible. Not the least because the Republic of Ireland has been sick of this shit for a good long time. The Good Friday Agreement had made the Troubles in Ireland kind of go away, but Brexit threatened to bring them back. The prospect of a hard Brexit with a hard Irish border was likely to see a lot of

violence, and no one really knew what to do about it. The Brexiteers just failed to talk about it, back in the days of "Reclaiming Our Freedoms." May failed again and again to get a deal that both the EU and her own party would agree to. Even when the EU was trying to ease the way, Boris Johnson, the next asshat in this story, would just gesticulate and yell that nothing was ever good enough, nothing what ever *Brexit* enough. Mostly because he was after her job.

May was just a nasty person. Before she was PM, she'd instituted a Home Office hostile environment policy in an effort to reduce migration. This policy amounted to the UK making itself so mean and incompetent that it would just be too hard and awful for migrants to stay. Her administration also deported people back to places where they would face human rights violations against international law. Eventually her hostile policy got so hostile that the government ended up detaining and deporting a bunch of elderly Afro-Caribbean migrants who had lived in the UK for decades legally, after answering the call from the British government to rebuild England post WW2. Yes, the victims of this scandal were color coded, for easy human rights abuses! Eventually the scandal led to the establishment of a Windrush Day holiday in the UK, to commemorate the hard work and contributions of migrants, particularly Afro-Caribbean migrants, to rebuilding Britain.

This year the UK government celebrated Windrush Day by evicting an 89 year old woman born in Jamaica who came to the UK in 1960 to work in a factory. She built a life and raised her children in the UK. But she doesn't have a passport.

So that's going well.

Eventually Theresa May resigned after three years in office, making way for Boris Johnson.

The Good Chap Theory of Government Meets Boris Fucking Johnson



That no one has bother to work out or write down the nature of the UK Constitution makes things complicated at times. The

assumption of these well heeled and well educated (mostly) men is that if you were in the club, you were almost undoubtedly a Good Chap. This is actually a soft doctrine of British politics: that if you made it in the door, you're probably an good guy and we should just trust that. The good chap is someone with manners, morals, and decorum. How well this idiotic principle of governance held up historically may be a matter of opinion, but it did not survived May's successor, poisonous blancmange in human form, Boris Johnson. Johnson, a columnist who had jumped into politics presumably because he wasn't getting enough attention, campaigned hard for Brexit. He was Brexit's number one hype man, along with Lovecraftian Innsmouth monster Nigel Farage. Johnson has a kind of goofy golden retriever energy to him, a vague cover for the hedonistic nihilism he would show later and that would eventually bring him down. He tells truth and lies triumphantly and with gusto, never seeming to care which one he's doing at the moment. The Tories tried to treat Johnson like a normal good chap, and he destroyed them. More than any other lousy ass in this list of incompetent, cruel, bigoted British rulers, Boris Johnson wrecked the Conservative Party. He broke the law partying during his own lock down. He lied continuously and obviously to the House of Commons. He lied to the people of Britain about his "oven ready Brexit deal" which did nothing to fix the problems May had encountered. He lied to everyone with the ease of a child laughing.

Trying to treat Boris Johnson like a Good Chap was the political equivalent of kissing a nuclear control rod. The question isn't if you'll die, but when and how mangled you'll be when you die.

Eventually beset with too many scandals and actual crimes for the House to ignore, he exited the scene. The only person who benefited from Johnson's tenure was Nigel Farage. Farage is actually polling well enough to get a seat in Parliament right now. That's how bad the Tories fucked up.

Liz Truss



With Boris gone it was on to the next terrifying pasty Tory. After a contentious leadership election in which the Tory membership proved their mettle by overwhelmingly fighting to get Liz Truss into the Premiership over the desires of the people, the media, and the actual Tory MPs, who knew her and knew she was insane. But she got a chance to show the world her vision for a strong Britain. She took an economy David Cameron had spent years trying to ruin and managed to crash it completely in less than two months – Great British efficiency! The hurt she caused will be scarring the people of Britain for a generation, but at least she gets to hang out with Trump's crew in America now.

And Finally, Dishy

Rishi



It was time for the technocratic lanky human calculator to take the scene. Rishi Sunak, celebrated for his lack of

understanding about how viruses and air work in the midst of a pandemic. He managed to make his very own wave of disability and death, with his Eat Out to Help Out scheme, and by this point doesn't that seem like the top line of the CV for a Tory Prime Minister?

Sunak was as bad as all of them, though he never quite rose to their deliberate evil, more fumbling without caring who he hurt. Perhaps an improvement on the Tories' active and hateful malice. In the end, Rishi Sunak was unlucky, last to be holding the premiership hot potato as the 5 year clock ran down. He decided on sudden death to go for it, try to get re-elected against all odds, or at least be done with it so he can move back to Venice Beach, gaze out at the Pacific from his mansion, and ignore the kids killing each other in gang fights behind his building. July 4th can be his independence day, and he can go back and re-up that green card.

Maybe even get a job at Facebook to keep him busy.

After 14 years of Conservative rule, Britain is broken and exhausted. Labour and Kier Starmer is almost certainly headed for a win, but like Tony Blair, Labour is just trying to be the Tories Lite. No one is holding out much hope the Starmer will fix the nation, because he's made it clear he won't. He's promising just slightly less of the same things the Tories are promising. So the British slog on to the polls tomorrow.

Perfidious Albion, indeed.

I'll give the last word to the illimitable
Douglas Adams, who knew his people well:

"...On its world, the people are people. The
leaders are lizards. The people hate the lizards
and the lizards rule the people."

"Odd," said Arthur, "I thought you said it was a
democracy."

"I did," said Ford. "It is."

"So," said Arthur, hoping he wasn't sounding
ridiculously obtuse, "why don't people get rid
of the lizards?"

"It honestly doesn't occur to them," said Ford.

"They've all got the vote, so they all pretty
much assume that the government they've voted in
more or less approximates to the government they
want."

"You mean they actually vote for the lizards?"

"Oh yes," said Ford with a shrug, "of course."

"But," said Arthur, going for the big one again,
"why?"

"Because if they didn't vote for a lizard," said
Ford, "the wrong lizard might get in. Got any
gin?"

"What?"

"I said," said Ford, with an increasing air of
urgency creeping into his voice, "have you got
any gin?"