

# [***Everything seems to be going wrong for Rishi Sunak***](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:6BV8-4961-DY7V-G06W-00000-00&context=1516831)

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**Body**

(CNN) &#8212; Life must seem bleak for British Prime Minister [*Rishi Sunak*](https://www.cnn.com/2024/02/16/uk/sunak-conservatives-by-election-losses-intl/index.html) these days.

With just two weeks until local elections that will likely go badly for his governing Conservative Party, there is a growing sense that Sunak is a man to whom the epithet "in office but not in power" applies.

Sunak has said that he will hold a [*general election this year,*](https://www.cnn.com/2023/12/30/uk/uk-2024-election-due-sunak-intl-cmd-gbr/index.html) but has yet to confirm its date. Received wisdom is that he is hanging on as long as possible to avoid a catastrophic loss that could force his party into a decade of political irrelevance. The assumption is that the longer he leaves it, the better the chance he can turn public opinion around.

The problem for Sunak is that everything he does seems to backfire in some way.

Take an example from this week: his [*world-leading smoking ban*](https://www.cnn.com/2024/04/17/opinions/uk-smoking-ban-rishi-sunak-conservatives-thomas/index.html), which, if approved by parliament's upper house, will be a key part of his political legacy.

It was only voted through by MPs because it has the support of the opposition Labour Party. Members of his own cabinet - mostly those considered to be eyeing up his job - voted against the legislation. His two predecessors publicly ridiculed him. Former PM Boris Johnson told a Canadian audience: "The party of Winston Churchill wants to ban [cigars]? Donnez-moi un break, as they say in Quebec. It's just mad."

Liz Truss, who had spent the week lobbing grenades at Sunak in the guise of promoting her new book, called the ban a "virtue-signalling piece of legislation."

In total, nearly half of Sunak's MPs failed to vote in favor of the plan, an astonishing open display of division for the Conservatives, who used to call themselves the natural party of government. Allies of Sunak deny it, but the idea that he has any authority over his party, his government or his country is increasingly laughable.

He seems to have bad luck. This week, for example, inflation fell and his flagship immigration policy took a step closer to becoming legislation. Instead of headlines championing these successes, the political agenda was dominated for days by the launch of Truss's book.

Some of the bad luck he creates himself. Last month, his party's deputy chairman left the Conservatives to join rival right-wing party Reform UK. Lee Anderson was a key ally forthe prime minister, as he represented something Sunak himself cannot.

Anderson is a working-class former miner who is from a part of the country that traditionally votes for the opposition Labour Party. Indeed, Anderson used to be a Labour politician. Brexit, among other things, pushed many of these traditional Labour voters to the right, leading to many of them supporting the Conservative Party in 2019.

Sunak, a privately-educated multi-millionaire tech bro, doesn't immediately appeal to these voters for obvious reasons. However, Anderson was suspended from the Conservative Party after making comments about the Muslim mayor of London, Sadiq Khan, that Sunak clearly believed were beyond the pale. Shortly after this, Anderson made a high-profile defection to a party that is a large obstacle to the Conservatives performing well at the next election.

Of course, Sunak could have chosen to not make Anderson, who has a history of saying controversial things and embarrassing those around him, deputy party chairman. But he did and now that decision looks ridiculous, as Anderson publicly campaigns against his former boss on a daily basis.

Sunak has a habit of keeping people around him who are likely to cause him pain. He had to sack his former home secretary, Suella Braverman, after she wrote an article for a newspaper criticizing the police without the approval of the PM. Following her dismissal,Braverman accused Sunak of "betrayal" over migration policy.

Over time, Sunak has been outflanked on the right by members of his own party so often that he no longer has any authority among the most Conservative voters. He is bizarrely seen as a soft Conservative compared to someone like Johnson, despite his personal ***politics*** on many issues being way to Johnson's right.

This stuff may all sound a little in the weeds, but over time, Sunak's authority has been heavily eroded. A former government official told CNN: "The Conservatives just feel dead overall, there is nothing to be done to save it. There is no way back and it's coming across in every little thing. Rishi comes across as unlikeable and a bit weird and tetchy."

It's hard to argue with that analysis. The polls never seem to improve. Every positive comes with a heavy caveat. Another example: Next week, his controversial policy of sending asylum-seekers to Rwanda while their claims are processed will, probably, finally pass parliament. The most immediate impact of the bill, however, has been a surge in the very same small boat crossings he is determined to halt - up 56% in the first three months of 2024, [*according to the EU's Frontex border agency*](https://www.frontex.europa.eu/media-centre/news/news-release/europe-s-migratory-situation-irregular-crossings-down-12-in-first-quarter-hE2mDz).

European officials privately attribute this to people knowing the bill is likely to pass and that it's going to be harder to enter the UK. So they are rushing in now while they believe they still can. But the nuance of that will be lost on voters who want to see migration fall. They will just see a56% increase and a new policy that has insufficient time to make a difference before the next election.

This is probably what the next six months looks like for Sunak. He will try and offer tax cuts that won't be enough for the right of his party. He will make promises on red-meat right-wing issues that will be ridiculed as weak by people like Braverman and Truss.

Truss, of course, is probably most famous for being the shortest-serving PM in history. Her legacy is forever tied to a [*comedy lettuce*](https://www.cnn.com/videos/media/2022/10/20/liz-truss-vs-lettuce-live-stream-british-tabloid-uk-stewart-pkg-intl-cprog-vpx.cnn) that a newspaper editor bet would outlast her (it did). When even she is openly making fun of you, things must be really bad.

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