

# [***Look of the Week: The UK Prime Minister just 'ruined' this classically cool sneaker***](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:6BS0-0Y31-DY7V-G019-00000-00&context=1516831)

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**Body**

(CNN) &#8212; It's been deemed the end of Adidas Sambas. Once hailed as the favorite shoe of Harry Styles, Kaia Gerber, Bella Hadid, Paul Mescal and even Rihanna, just to name a few, it's now apparently all over for the 1950s three-striped sneaker. Why? Because UK Prime Minister Rishi Sunak was seen wearing a pair.

In an [*Instagram video*](https://www.instagram.com/p/C5VeEQaoBN_/?hl=en) posted Friday, Sunak's explanation of his Conservative government's latest tax and childcare policies was to a large extent overshadowed by his "everyman" shoes. "The sambas, guess he's one of us now," read one comment. "His trainers really helped (the video) become easily understandable and relatable for me," added another sarcastically. The British press were equally resistant to any sartorial strategy that might have been in play. "Yet another try-hard bid to appear relatable has backfired," wrote journalist Michael Hogan for left-leaning national newspaper [*The Guardian*](https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2024/apr/06/rishi-sunak-biggest-sartorial-blunder-shoe-in-adidas-samba-trainers). "In a bid to present himself as young and hip... Sunak took an eternally cool sneaker, and ruined it for everyone," added [*British GQ*](https://www.gq-magazine.co.uk/article/rishi-sunak-adidas-sambas-2024).

Sunak has since [*offered*](https://www.lbc.co.uk/news/rishi-sunak-apology-adidas-trainers/) "a fulsome apology to the Samba community" during an interview with London-based radio station LBC. "In my defence I would say I have been wearing Adidas trainers and Sambas and others for many, many years," he said, calling the shoe his "first pair of fun trainers."

"I remain intrigued and amused by the amount of focus on what I wear," he added.

It's a far cry from the public reaction another political leader received after being spotted in a pair of sneakers. In the summer of 2019, former president Barack Obama was seen at an Obama Foundation event in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, wearing box-fresh Stan Smiths. The [*internet swooned in response*](https://www.cnn.com/style/article/barack-obama-stan-smith-remember-when/index.html), calling the look tasteful, playful and on-point.

And when Kamala Harris began pounding the 2020 campaign trail in an assortment of Converse sneakers (Chuck Taylors in both leather and canvas, All Stars and even badge-adorned high tops), she was lauded for a brave subversion of the rules of political dress.

So why aren't Sunak's Sambas striking the same chord? Firstly, context is everything. Obama was a conservative dresser during his presidency, in keeping with the traditional suits beloved by Bill Clinton, George W. Bush and Ronald Reagan. Obama was known for his plain, dark suits and office-appropriate, lace-up shoes. There was just one hallowed incident of a stylistic misjudgement: "Tan Suit Gate," which was never to be repeated. In fact, his sneaker era only began years after he left the Oval Office.

Likewise, Harris was careful to reach for her Chucks only on specific occasions - either when traveling or on the trail, but never when she is in the White House - and otherwise maintaining a sense of respect for dress code and professionalism that, according to social media, the public finds important. Last summer, when then-Speaker of the House Kevin McCarthy and House Minority Leader Representative Hakeem Jeffries were [*photographed*](https://twitter.com/dieworkwear/status/1658939971213074438/photo/1) in the Oval Office wearing hybrid dress sneakers (brogues up top with a rubber sole, or sometimes just leather gym shoes) the response was similar to the outrage caused by Sunak.

While many politicians have been keen to advertise their sneaker collection, Donald Trump was the first former president to capitalize on the rising trend. In February, one day after he was ordered by a judge [*to pay nearly $355 million*](https://www.cnn.com/2024/02/16/politics/takeaways-donald-trump-fraud-ruling/index.html) in his New York civil fraud trial, Trump launched a sneaker line at Sneaker Con in Philadelphia. The primary design was a gold high-top shoe featuring a white and red sole, an American flag and an embossed 'T' on the outer flank. Christened the "NEVER SURRENDER HIGH-TOP SNEAKER," it is available to purchase for $399.

Perhaps the furor over Sunak's sneakers isn't purely because it's inconceivable that the wealthiest Prime Minister in British history would be wearing relatively humble $100 shoes - though that doesn't help - and instead has more to do with when he wore them. The sambas appeared to be a transparent attempt at signal dressing, if not a potential distraction away from the ***politics*** of his interview. Even the most ardent sneakerheads know there is a time and a place for a gum sole, and the British public have decided on-camera at 10 Downing Street is neither.

By Leah Dolan, CNN

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