

## CPGE – lesson 6 – 15 oct 2024

News presentation:

CHECK – Text review

### The U.K. will have 5 prime ministers in just 6 years. What's gone wrong?

source : NPR, 20th of October 2022

LONDON — The United Kingdom used to be synonymous with stable, dependable, if sometimes **dull**, governance. But **the resignation** Thursday of Prime Minister Liz Truss — after six weeks in office — shows just how chaotic British politics **has become in recent years**.

Truss is the fourth prime minister to resign since the Brexit vote of 2016. That's the fastest turnover in a century. No. 10 Downing Street has effectively become a revolving door.

What's the matter with Britain? Analysts here say it is a story of polarization, populism, a **flawed** political system and poor leadership that has at times put party and personal ambition above the good of the country.

#### A miscalculation of historic proportions

It begins with former Prime Minister David Cameron who called a referendum on leaving the European Union. Cameron hoped the vote in 2016 would end a civil war inside his own Conservative Party on Britain's relationship with Europe and keep the party in power.

It was a miscalculation of historic proportions. The British people voted to leave the EU by a small, but convincing margin. The result not only highlighted Britain's **bitter divisions**, but also changed the course of the country's foreign, economic and **trade** policies. Most political scientists and economists predicted that leaving the EU would make this island nation poorer and politically less relevant.

It immediately became clear that the architects of the Brexit vote, including its most effective campaigner, Boris Johnson, had no real plan for **untangling decades of economic and legal ties** with the EU. Political chaos followed.

Cameron resigned after the referendum and Theresa May became prime minister. In another major miscalculation, she called a snap election in 2017, only to lose her party's control of the House of Commons.

May repeatedly tried to drive a Brexit deal through parliament, only to be **foiled** in part by the anti-European wing of her own party which wanted a clean divorce from Europe. Brexit eventually **brought May down** as it had her predecessor.

The party then turned to Johnson, the charismatic if deeply **flawed** showman who had a track record of winning elections. He campaigned to "get Brexit done." Johnson led the party to a landslide victory in 2019. The next year, he completed the U.K.'s departure from the EU and seemed poised to rule for years.

## The fantasy: Scandinavian welfare at American tax levels

Then came the coronavirus pandemic, which Johnson underplayed, until he ended up in an intensive care unit with the virus. His government's slow response to COVID led to more than 200,000 deaths the highest toll in Europe — and drew heavy criticism. But what ended Johnson's premiership was his lying.

While Johnson's government ruled out social gatherings to limit the spread of Covid, government staff held parties. Meanwhile, most Britons **stuck to the rules**, even if it meant not saying goodbye to dying loved ones. Johnson insisted his government had adhered to lockdown regulations. In fact, it turned out he had attended two events. He was forced to apologize and pay a fine. Politically, Johnson was finished.

Truss replaced Johnson in September, promising to kick-start the economy with tax cuts for corporations and the rich without reducing public spending. Amid 10% inflation here and rising energy prices because of the war in Ukraine, Truss' plan **spooked** financial markets, **crashed the pound** and **sent mortgage rates soaring**.

Tim Bale, a professor of politics at Queen Mary University in London, says one reason Tory prime ministers such as Johnson and Truss have **flamed out** is because they promised the public things they can't deliver. In the case of Johnson, it was a cost- and trouble-free Brexit; and with Truss, unfunded tax cuts.

"It's a fantasy that many Brits are willing to believe, that because of our supposedly glorious past, we're also entitled to an equally glorious present or future," says Bale, whose new book, *The Conservative Party After Brexit*, comes out in March. "I think politicians continue to feed the myth that we can have Scandinavian levels of welfare on American levels of taxation."

Patrick Dunleavy, emeritus professor of political science and public policy at the London School of Economics, says flaws in the U.K.'s system of government and the way the Conservative Party chooses its leaders have also contributed to the **ongoing turmoil**. For instance, prime ministers can freely appoint people to very important jobs without parliamentary oversight as you have, say, with Senate confirmation hearings in the U.S. Dunleavy says that permitted Truss to appoint Kwasi Kwarteng, a little-known political ally, to be **chancellor of the Exchequer**, Britain's treasury secretary. Truss fired Kwarteng on Friday after their shared economic plan **wreaked havoc** with financial markets.

Dunleavy says another problem is party leadership is decided not by parliamentarians, but party members, who — in the case of the Tories — tend to be whiter, older and more conservative than the rest of the British population. "They are not very well-informed or critical as an electorate," says Dunleavy. "So, they've chosen badly, really, with Boris Johnson and Liz Truss."



Rishi Sunak becomes Britain's third prime in under two months at a time when the U.K. faces what he has termed a "profound economic challenge" and as his Conservative Party struggles to heal **divisive wounds from months of infighting**.

He now leads the Conservatives with a substantial parliamentary majority inherited since the 2019 general election, when his former boss Boris Johnson helped win seats in areas of Britain that had never traditionally voted for the center right party.

"Right now our country is facing a profound economic crisis," he said. "The aftermath of COVID still **lingers**."

The ascent of Sunak, whose parents are of Indian origin, was cheered in India and among the South Asian diaspora in Britain. Sunak, born in England, has talked about how his family gave him "opportunities they could only dream of" and how Britain "gave them and millions like them a chance of a better future." In his Monday remarks, Sunak said: "It is the greatest privilege of my life to be able to serve the party I love and give back to the country I owe so much to."

Sunak is one of the **wealthiest** people in Britain. He and his wife, Indian tech heiress Akshata Murty, have an estimated fortune of about 730 million pounds (\$827 million) — and his premiership may mark the first time the residents at Downing Street are richer than those at Buckingham Palace.

## VOCABULARY

Explain the words in bold

## Grammar

- present perfect :
- phrasal verbs :

Work in groups to answer the following questions (after reading the text and using your personal knowledge) :

1. Why did D Cameron call for a referendum about the exit from the EU ?

2. What are the main reasons which led to Boris Johnson's resignation ?

3. What went wrong with L. Truss' plan ?

4. Explain the following sentence : « *I think politicians continue to feed the myth that we can have Scandinavian levels of welfare on American levels of taxation.* »

5. Watch the beginning of the following video [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-61Bw3JkTdY&ab\\_channel=AssociatedPress](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-61Bw3JkTdY&ab_channel=AssociatedPress) . Which are « **the exceptionally difficult circumstances both at home and abroad** »?

## ARTICLE 2 - Keir Starmer confirmed as Britain's new prime minister after Labour Party's decisive win

NBC News, [Yuliya Talmazan](#), 2024

Keir Starmer is Britain's new leader after his Labour Party ended 14 years of Conservative rule. Prime Minister Rishi Sunak apologized for his party's performance.

**What policies can we expect to see from the new Labour government?**

The first step for Keir Starmer is done as his Labour Party has been swept into government.

But what did he promise and what policies can we expect from him in the coming weeks and months?

High on Labour's list of things to fix will be cutting waiting times for hospital treatment, which have been on the increase since the Conservatives came into power 14 years ago and **skyrocketed** during the pandemic.

Labour pledged 40,000 more appointments a week in the cash-strapped National Health Service (NHS), but how it will be paid for is a bit vague. The party's manifesto says it will be done by "cracking down on tax avoidance" and other **loopholes**.

Another key priority is economic stability as Britain is climbing its way out of the cost-of-living crisis and a recession. The party has promised no hikes to income tax rates or the consumption tax, known in the U.K. as VAT.

Starmer has also promised to make the country's borders safer by creating a new Border Security Command and using "counter-terror style powers" to stop human **smuggling**.

He has **vowed to scrap** the controversial measure introduced by the Conservatives to ship asylum-seekers arriving on the British shores, often by making **treacherous** journeys across the English Channel, to Rwanda, and **stem out** people-smuggling gangs instead with the money rerouted from the Rwanda project. As far as its foreign policy, the party said it sees the United States as an "indispensable ally" and its commitment to NATO will be unshakeable. It will also seek out an "improved and ambitious" relationship with Europe, eight years after the Brexit vote.

The U.K.'s support for Ukraine will also remain **steadfast** under Labour, as it plans to continue to push for an immediate cease-fire in Gaza.

**Vocabulary**

1. In what way the Labour Government is planning to pursue its mandate?

2. What political orientation does the Labour Party have ? Can you name another British PM from this party ?

AFTER READING the 2 DOCUMENTS – answer the following question : In what way has Brexit affected the political scene in the latest years ?