

## Political Turmoil in Britain (and Europe). Aaron Bastani. [C2]

Sono tempi incerti e caotici per la politica, specialmente in Europa e in Inghilterra. Ne parliamo con un esperto e ci addentriamo nelle sfumature della destra, capitanata in Italia da Giorgia Meloni e nella Gran Bretagna da politici con profili simili a quello di Liz Truss.



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For the British and Europeans, it is difficult to [make sense](#) of the notoriously complex Italian political system, with its rapid formation and sudden collapse of parties and coalitions. Similarly, Italians and other Europeans might [wonder](#) how populism, among other political [trends](#) more commonly associated with other parts of the world, is now showing up in the British two-party system. In recent months, two leaders, Giorgia Meloni in Italy and Liz Truss in Britain, with her [speedy rise](#) and dramatic fall, have [caught the public imagination](#). While both are [right-wing](#), there are different media narratives that describe their political positions. Liz Truss, [appointed](#) as leader by the British Conservative Party when Boris Johnson resigned, was [regarded](#) as a conservative that [fitted](#) within a liberal tradition; Giorgia Meloni, [voted in](#) after a general election, is instead placed on the far-right, within a neo-fascist sphere. Another view argues that both

politicians are incarnations of a neoliberal ideology [pursued](#) by figures such as Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan in the 1980s.

## CONSERVATIVE

To compare their positions and to try to comprehend the rise of the far-right in Britain and Europe, Speak Up [reached out](#) to expert Aaron Bastani, co-founder of the [left-wing](#) British independent media organisation Novara Media. We began by asking Bastani where the former British Prime Minister [lies](#) on the political spectrum: **Aaron Bastani (British accent):** Liz Truss is more of an orthodox economic liberal. She has been her whole life. In Britain the media has kind of focused on the fact she used to be a Liberal Democrat, and people say “Oh, she’s all over the place, she was a Liberal Democrat, now she’s a Conservative”, but actually she’s been an economic liberal her whole life. She’s always believed in a very small State, she’s always believed in wealth creation coming from the people at the top rather than workers... And what has changed is obviously that she viewed the Conservative Party rather than the Liberal Democrats as the best vehicle for her personal ambitions. But she’s always been a Thatcherite, a believer in free markets.

## REACTIONARY

In contrast, Giorgia Meloni’s conservatism is of the reactionary kind, says Bastani. **Aaron Bastani (English accent):** Giorgia Meloni, on the other hand, has that social conservatism sort of at her heart. That is what [drives](#) her in politics. In English we would call her a ‘reactionary’, I wouldn’t call her a ‘conservative’. And that’s a quite important term; it’s an old term but I don’t think it’s [outdated](#). I actually think it’s more and more relevant now in the 2020s. So, what do I mean by a ‘reactionary’? A reactionary is somebody who has a really critical disposition to the modern world in a number of ways; what modernity means for family, identity, nation, the individual, God... And often that can that can have some [left-wing](#) inflections and tones: they might criticise consumer capitalism, they might criticise globalisation. The rhetoric can be seen as plausibly [overlapping](#) with the Left.

## NEOLIBERAL FRAGMENTATION

Bastani argues that the conservative coalition that defined world politics for decades is [breaking down](#). **Aaron Bastani:** These two politicians are kind of different parts of the conservative coalition over the last forty years. It has had those social conservatives, those reactionaries, anti-immigrant rhetoric, etc., etc., and it's had the people who want free markets, wealth creation from the top [and so on](#). And the magic of the centre-right project, with Thatcher, with Reagan, with Berlusconi, with a number of other politicians too, is [bringing a really big coalition together](#). And actually they disagree about some pretty big things when you really [break it down](#). And what we're seeing now is that coalition sort of [splintering](#) and fracturing.

## RISE OF THE FAR-RIGHT

So, do far-right parties have power in UK politics, or is the rise of such parties a European phenomenon? As Bastani explains, Britain's voting system plays a defining role. **Aaron Bastani:** There is very little difference between what is happening in Britain and France and Italy. [It boils down to](#) the electoral system. That's all it is. So, where we had an electoral system that was proportional, like European elections — we've now [got rid](#) of those because we're not member of the EU anymore — UKIP came first in one set of elections, the Brexit party came first in another set of elections, right. That's unthinkable in Westminster elections [because] we have a first-past-the-post system. Remember, the whole reason why we had the referendum in the first place is that in 2015 UKIP got four million votes. It's a lot of votes, and under a proportional representation system, that would have meant they were in coalition with the Conservative Party. But of course they weren't in coalition with the Conservative party because they got no [MPs](#), out of four million votes, which is just incredible.

## VULNERABILITIES

The British two-party system is not immune to an infiltration by the far-right. **Aaron Bastani:** So you can go further back, you can look at the 2009

European elections. Then, the year after the financial crisis, a party called the British National Party, the BNP — which is a fascist party, explicitly a fascist party —, they got nine hundred thousand votes. And there's been no [breakthrough](#) by those parties in a Westminster election because of the electoral system. Now, on the one hand, you might say "That's fantastic. Look, first past the post [inoculates](#) Britain from the kinds of politics you see on the radical right..." Not so fast, because what happened instead was effectively a sort of parasitization, a [takeover](#) of the Conservative Party by actually quite extreme elements. And I think in a way that's far more unhealthy, I think it's much healthier to have a coalition on the right, and people know what their politics are. And when they [fail](#), they [fail](#) on those terms. If we had a proportional system in this country, you would have a much smaller Conservative Party and you would have a reasonably significant party to their right, and it will be led by somebody like a Nigel Farage. So I think the exact same dynamics are happening, but they're [playing out](#) very differently.

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# Glossary

- **fitted** = inserirsi
- **voted in** = eleggere per votazione
- **and so on** = eccetera
- **make sense** = comprendere, trovare un senso
- **left-wing** = di sinistra
- **playing out** = svilupparsi
- **trends** = tendenze
- **caught the public imagination** = catturare l'attenzione del pubblico
- **break it down** = guardare i dettagli
- **takeover** = presa di potere
- **got rid** = disfarsi
- **wonder** = domandarsi
- **appointed** = designare
- **pursued** = dedicarsi, perseguire
- **lies** = trovarsi
- **reached out** = contattare
- **drives** = spingere
- **outdated** = sorpassato, obsoleto
- **fail** = fallire
- **breakthrough** = svolta
- **inoculates** = vaccinare, immunizzare
- **regarded** = considerare
- **overlapping** = sovrapporre
- **breaking down** = scomporsi, fratturarsi
- **bringing a really big coalition together** = unire
- **speedy rise** = veloce ascesa
- **splintering** = frantumare
- **It boils down to** = si riduce a
- **right-wing** = di destra
- **MPs** = deputati (Members of Parliament)