

Britain's Political Trajectory

By [True Publica](#)

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For years now, as regular readers of Truepublica will know, I have consistently [warned](#) that Britain will be moving from a system of liberal democracy towards authoritarianism and that it would only take a few short years to achieve. As we moved through the discord and division of the EU referendum from 2016, I also took the view that a new form of ideology would be looking to usurp Britain's system of governance, with its constitutional checks and balances, having been vandalised by [right-wing autocrats](#). This might very well end with a form of 'guided democracy' – or another way of putting it, [a de facto autocracy](#).' More qualified people are slowly coming to the same conclusion.

In Britain, we have never had jackboots marching down our high streets and so we are too trusting of events. We Brits do not believe that such extremes could possibly take hold. Authoritarianism has many veils and not all of them come with uniforms and insignia but in the end, with its variances, it amounts to the same. But don't take my word for it, the experts are more worried than me.

Phil Syrpis is Professor of EU Law at the University of Bristol Law School. He [wrote in a recent article](#) for the London School of Economics that:

"He (Boris Johnson) has sought, in a range of ways, to minimise Parliamentary scrutiny of his actions. He has plans for the judiciary, both in terms of its composition, and its ability to hold the government to account via judicial review. He attacks the BBC and the civil service. He treats the devolved governments with barely disguised contempt. Institutions which serve as 'checks and balances' against executive power are systematically undermined because they might object to things he might want to do. It seems that we are dealing with a Prime Minister who is interested in power for power's sake."

Syrpis goes on to say:

"We have a Prime Minister who rejects scrutiny and constraint. He is showing himself to be reckless about the consequences of his actions, and uninterested in the people and business groups most affected by his policies. All the while, he is constructing a narrative that he is delivering 'the will of the people', standing up for 'our' interests in the face of the threats created by others. For now, it appears to be working."

These thoughtfully measured words demonstrate something that is dawning on many. That Boris Johnson wants to increase executive power in order that he can push through his version of Brexit – whatever that might be. And under the cover of Brexit – most people in Britain are not seeing what else is going on.

Nicholas Reed Langen is a long-established expert on the British Constitution and writes for [The Justice Gap and Project Syndicate](#). He surmises that in one of the world's oldest democracies, Boris Johnson is moving executive power towards what he terms a 'constitutional dictator.' He does, however, go one step further in reviewing the trajectory of Johnson's ambitions:

"In attempting to imbue the executive branch with near omnipotence, both Johnson and Trump are aligning themselves with a view that bears a striking resemblance to that of the twentieth-century German jurist Carl Schmitt."

It shouldn't be under-estimated what is being said here. [Schmitt](#) was a well known, highly respected 20th-century political philosopher – a conservative German political theorist and in the end, a prominent member of the Nazi Party. He wrote extensively about the effective wielding of political power. His work has been a major influence on subsequent political theory, legal theory, continental philosophy and political theology, and remains to this day both influential and controversial due to his close association and juridical-political allegiance with Nazism. I am not suggesting the Boris Johnson is a Nazi – only that many leaders have taken this philosophy and applied it in varying grades of intensity.

Some have argued that neo-conservatism, the same form of economic management brought to us in the UK and USA by Thatcher and Raegan was indeed heavily influenced by Schmitt. It is interesting that the judicial theory espoused by Schmitt during the war years have since led to modern-day ideologies such as the 'war on terror' and substantial interference of international law such as the Geneva Convention. We have all seen this with the introduction of unlawful combatant status, indefinite imprisonment, rendition, torture and mass surveillance programmes – all of which mimic his writings and all of which were practised (wholly or in part, legally or otherwise) in Britain and America.

"In both cases, Johnson and Trump are following a Schmittian playbook, defending the constitutional legitimacy of their preferences by claiming that they are channelling the true voice of the people."

Both Sypris and Langen see the fraudulent alignment of "the will of the people" and gaining executive power to deliver fictitious benefits to them.

I have said for a long time now that the implications of this current political trajectory of the right-wing is really very worrying. Before Brexit, political scandals were pretty much restricted to expenses, corporate corruption and/or sexual indiscretions. Today, no-one cares because the new norm is all of that plus mass propaganda campaigns based around misinformation, breaking electoral laws, soliciting dark money from anonymous sources, raids on judicial and legislative restraints and blatant media coercion and threats. All of that has been proven as the current government strategy of control.

Thomas Piketty's seminal book '[Capital in the 21st Century](#)' states emphatically that "*no government programme could be sustained without an apparatus of justification*" – this is what we are seeing right now.

At the centre of Boris Johnson's administration is a desire to take a wrecking ball to the pillars that uphold institutional order in Britain – just as Schmitt would have endorsed.

Britain is now gliding down a dangerous and dimly lit tunnel with a T-junction in complete darkness – to be reached (so we are told) on the last day of 2020. Which way will Britain be led – toward liberal democracy with economic restraints via the EU or an illiberal corporatocracy escorted by authoritarianism? It's extraordinary to think that in this most dangerous of moments we, the public, are not allowed to know.

The latter could easily lead Britain quite rapidly to a dystopian scenario in which a prime minister would be imbued with Schmittian powers such as stripping rights from British citizens and foreign residents and to overthrow and dismantle the UK's political and economic model of the last five decades – all accompanied by the soundbites of the 'will of the people.' To keep up appearances, we would still have elections and courts, national newspapers and broadcasters – but they would be neutered, as is the ongoing battle to achieve just that right now. Public dissent will be policed and controlled and the judiciary's power to challenge No10 Downing Street completely restrained. Even the resignation of Sajid Javid and his replacement highlights the fact that [scrutiny within government is fading quickly](#).

As Langen says – *“Parliament would be relegated to the position of a mere bystander ... the implications of this philosophy for the legislature are alarming. But those for the courts are even more distressing.”*

German Politician Ralf Fücks warns in an interview that –

“The idea that one can separate democracy and freedom from one another has deep roots, precisely in the German history of ideas. In 1923 Schmitt in his famous criticism of parliamentarians attempted to separate out democracy and liberalism. His enemy is liberalism, democracy he abridged down to the rule of the people. Even bolshevism and fascism are for him possible forms of democracy.”

Just type into your web browser the keywords “Boris Johnson dictator” and news articles from all over the UK, Europe, America – even the Middle East and India have already proclaimed the arrival of a quasi- dictatorship in Britain after the proroguing of parliament and subsequent December plebiscite. From the [Irish Times](#) to Germany's [Deutsche Welle](#), the world has gasped in horror as Britain's characterful and mostly balanced polity has been replaced with an apathetic and disrespectful ringleader surrounded by dubious courtiers of political zealotry.

Philip Sargeant is an applied linguist at The Open University, specialising in the relationship between language, politics and social media. He [concludes](#) in an article for Democratic Audit that for all the soundbites, and the campaigns of misinformation that have got us to this moment, populists like Boris Johnson – *“have little real interest in engaging with the complexities of the challenges their societies face.”* And Britain has a lot of challenges to face, the imminence of Brexit is just one of them.

Make no mistake, Britain has chosen to take a sinister hard-right turn led by a radical faction of ideologues. It's a trajectory, it's leading somewhere – that's the real worry.

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