

2021 - The political forecast

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Knowing that political forecasts are even more of a mug's game than economic forecasts, and having [already done the latter](#), let me risk reputation and offer some forecasts for politics in the UK in 2021. First some assumptions are necessary.

Covid 19

The pandemic will get very much worse in the UK before there is any chance that it will get better. This will be because of government inaction. Many more people will die as a consequence, including from non-Covid emergencies that will go untreated.

New Covid variants

Failure to give double dose vaccines will significantly increase the risk that the UK and other countries endorsing single dose action will encourage the well-known risk of vaccine tolerant variants of Covid 19 developing that will prove much harder to treat.

The NHS

The NHS will be overwhelmed this spring, through no fault of its own. The stress will create considerable staff losses and leave it seriously weakened for some considerable time to come.

The economy

The economy will see little or no growth. There will be significant increases in insolvencies, even amongst government agencies. This will result in substantial increases in unemployment. The government will try austerity and this will create significant social tension. QE will fund a deficit very much higher than forecast. The UK will be the worst performer in Europe and maybe the OECD because of Covid and Brexit.

The environment

No real action will be taken. COP26 will be a zoom call. The planet will march relentlessly towards Armageddon.

The forecasts

As the new year arrived there was the first hint that faith in the government amongst diehard Tories might be cracking. As the year goes on substantial excess deaths, social and economic chaos, unemployment and stresses in supply chains resulting from Brexit will all pile in on the government as any prospect of a return to what looks like normal life becomes increasingly remote. That any return to normality might be bought at the cost of an enormous number of unnecessary deaths will be apparent to everyone.

The government's political support will wither as 2021 progresses. In England local elections will become a referendum on its management of the crisis. In Wales and Scotland devolved government elections will have even greater significance.

The SNP will have a majority in Scotland, and with other pro-independence parties, a significant one. The demand for a referendum will grow. If Westminster refuses Edinburgh will be unable to do so, come what may. The threat of social disorder without acceding to the demand will be too great to resist. To prevent allegations of misuse of public money the election will be crowd funded.

Wales will not go so far, as yet. The rise of independent parties will be significant, however. Labour will be under considerable pressure from Wales on devolution. Whether the English leadership will understand that is open to doubt.

Local government will become increasingly vocal, and active, in opposing government policy in England. Its rise will make it clear that the Tories might be in office but not in control.

The chance that the Tories will seek to ban parliament from sitting is very high. They will pass law to prevent legal objections before doing so. Rule by emergency power will be enacted. As opposition grows I suspect habeas corpus will be suspended. Social unrest, likely fuelled by government actions, is probable.

At some point, probably before mid-year, Johnson will be ousted by Tories anxious to retain power. They will seek to form a new government. There will be an almighty power battle to lead it. The new leader will not appease the country.

Labour will prevaricate until after the May elections, when results that are not as it hoped in Wales and Scotland, or as overwhelming as they should be elsewhere, will force it into partnership discussions with other parties.

The call for a general election will grow by the summer. The attempt to maintain order will start with a Tory offer of a national government, and end with an election.

The SNP will support Labour on condition that a legal referendum is granted on independence, and that Wales is given more powers. Other parties may cut a deal to deliver seats from the Tories, knowing that electoral reform is essential when Scotland leaves the Union. This will explicitly be on offer.

A new government will begin a long and very painful rebuilding process. A Tory rump in parliament will continually shout about the corrupt overthrow of their government and seek to undermine democracy from an increasingly far right position whenever they can.

The alternative

Johnson weathers it all out. He might. I think it unlikely.