

We're in for a mighty political ride

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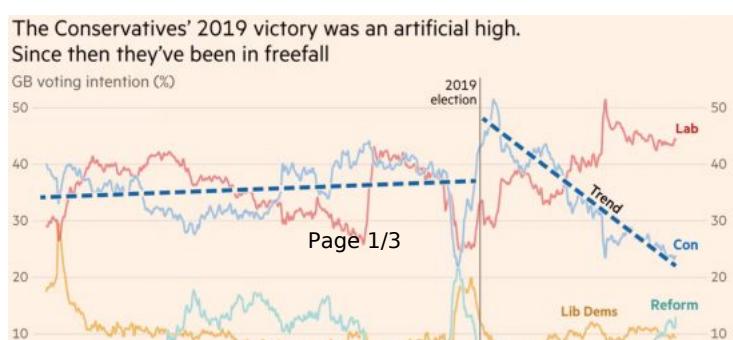
Newspaper columnists are queueing up to speculate upon the demise of the Conservative party. Most are presuming that the latest opinion polls, suggesting that the party will get significantly fewer than 100 seats in the next parliament, might be right. Even the wildest optimists on that party's behalf are questioning whether it might ever recover from the shock that this election, and the public reaction to 14 years of outright incompetence, might deliver.

Please forgive me if I do not mourn the demise of an organisation that has been, overall, so profoundly harmful to the well-being of this country. If the Tories can be identified for having done anything, apart from Brexit, it would be for opposing every single social reform of any consequence for many decades, if not centuries.

Forgive me too for not celebrating its demise when it is apparent that this might only be happen because the Labour Party has now morphed into what the Tories once were, with every prejudice against the majority of people in this country having been adopted by that supposedly left-of-centre party along the way. The reality is that the Tory party has not gone away. It has just changed its name.

And, whilst we are at it, let's note that the one third of the country that always appears to be inclined to vote for the denial of any form of rights or representation for the majority of people in the UK still exists. All that has happened is that their support is now divided between Reform and the Tories, with the former now having a chance of beating the Conservatives in terms of total voter share in the forthcoming election.

But what has really happened? One of the best explanations comes from John Burn-Murdoch in the FT today. He is a data specialist possessed of the ability to contextually interpret his findings in ways that are compelling. His [article in today's FT](#) includes this chart:



He notes three things. The first is that in two thirds of all opinion polls since 2010 Labour has been in the lead, but that they have not turned that into victories, so far.

Second, the 2019 victory was obviously out of character. There was a desire to close the Brexit chapter and Corbyn alienated some voters. Boris Johnson had his moment. And then everything fell apart. This was not due to any one event. Truss did not create or even change the trajectory. The collapse was because, as Burn Murdoch puts it, the Tories had a choice. They could either promote populism or what he calls deliverism, by which he means actually getting things done.

The Tories have throughout their period in office chosen populism. Election rhetoric always worked for them, and somehow kept them in office, except, that is, until Johnson made it very clear that they had never delivered, from which point their support has collapsed.

The change in the Tory's fortunes has, in other words, come about because the rhetoric has clearly failed, and been trumped by the reality of failure. For the true believers there is now Reform. For the older voter who cannot change the habit of a lifetime, the Tory party is still there. For all those who care about what government does the Conservatives have nothing left to offer because they have never made a promise they can deliver and it is now very apparent that they will not.

On a morning when a swing to the Right has been seen across Europe, this idea is very important.

It's also vital to recall that the right-wing rhetoric of the parties winning in Europe is deeply conflicted. The libertarians do not agree with the authoritarians. The free traders hate the isolationists. The pro-Europeans, like the Italian far-right, cannot abide the French anti-Europeans of Le Pen. And everywhere the right is either not delivering, or is only succeeding in crushing dissent. I am not convinced that will, eventually, work in a digital age, and that's because eventually, as is happening in the UK, people will notice this inability of the right to deliver. All they are good for is populist rhetoric.

That said, here in the UK we have to note that Labour is now a conservative party, even if it is not the party of that name. It is now populist. It is not promising to deliver almost anything. It is in denial of the duty of any government to protect the most vulnerable. It seeks to appease markets above all else. It is pandering to wealth. In other words, it too plans not to deliver.

How, then does Burn-Murdoch's chart extrapolate? I suggest that the pattern for the next five years is going to look very like that for the last five. Labour will sweep in and then see its support evaporate, steadily and decisively, as its own choice not to deliver becomes apparent to a population desperate for government who are only being offered noise by politicians incapable of delivering anything else.

The question, in that case, is not what will happen now. We know the answer to that. The question to ask now is what happens in 2029, if Starmer gets that far?

People are not going to forget Tory failure that quickly.

Nor are they going to forgive Labour if it really does not, as seems likely, deliver almost anything of substance because of its fear of creating money.

So, who fills the void then?

I don't think it is the right. Their appeal is too limited. There are few votes to be had there that are not already declared to be for them. Instead the issue is what happens on the left, which has won most opinion polls since 2010. It's a moderately left of centre government that most people want. Labour has abandoned that scene. So who fills the gap? This is going to be the question for the next five years unless Labour suddenly changes tack between now and then.

We're in for a mighty political ride.