



By: *Harvey Morris*

Britain should not allow the doom-mongers to dominate the national debate



A concerned overseas reader messaged this week: “Is there any good news coming out of the UK at the moment?”

Put the question to the spin doctors in Downing Street, Buckingham Palace or the BBC’s Broadcasting House, and their honest answer would have to be a resounding no.

Each week exposes some fresh crisis touching on one or other of the once valued institutions of what one domestic commentator described as “bumbling Britain”.

Every drama is then magnified in the country’s notoriously fractious and partisan media to create the perception of a divisive national malaise.

It would be wrong, however, to accuse the media messengers of fabricating what is an increasingly evident mood of political and social discontent.

A highly fragmented electorate

Research published this summer by More in Common, a non-profit organisation that advocates for initiatives to tackle societal divisions, was tellingly labelled **Shattered Britain**.

The pessimistic title reflected its findings that seven out of 10 Britons believe the country is on the wrong track, with many concluding that its problems lie not with one party or political leader but with the system itself.

“For many Britons, recent years have been imbued with a sense of unending crises and dissatisfaction with the status quo” - More in Common survey

The findings pointed to a collapse of faith in political institutions, with 87 per cent of Britons having either not very much trust in politicians or none at all.

Within a highly fragmented electorate, this distrust was found to extend to other institutions, including the courts, the press, media and business.

The survey concluded that “for many Britons, recent years have been imbued with a sense of unending crises and dissatisfaction with the status quo.”

Some doomsayers have gone further to suggest that Britain is headed inexorably towards a civil war.

A crisis of legitimacy

Around the time of the More in Common survey, UK-based academic David Betz said the country had already passed the tipping point towards a conflict spurred by a breakdown of the social contract.

Betz, a Canadian war studies researcher at London’s King’s College, was expanding on previous academic papers in which he wrote that Britain, along with France, was most likely to experience the outbreak of **violent civil conflict** within as little as five years.

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In a presentation hosted by the commentary site UnHerd, Betz pointed to a combination of factionalism and loss of faith in normal politics and the legitimacy of the system.

In comments that were widely viewed online and picked up in the press, he also referred to a replacement narrative in which a once dominant majority felt it was losing its status.

Meanwhile, traditional bulwarks against conflict, including prosperity and a British culture of “doing the right thing”, were being eroded as elites fractured and the public’s expectations for the future declined.

“Neither brave nor wise”

In the current mood of permacrisis, along with such predictions of worse to come, the question arises of how the current government is doing in fulfilling its promise to reverse the slide with its plan for change.

With Prime Minister Keir Starmer's favourability rating stranded in the doldrums at around 20 per cent, even his allies admit that it is not going well.

A chaotic series of contradictory briefings suggested rivals were plotting to replace him - or maybe they weren't - at a time when internal Labour Party divisions surfaced over the economy and immigration.

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The Economist magazine's Adam Roberts, who coined the “bumbling Britain” jibe, accused the Starmer government of being “neither brave nor wise” in tinkering at the margins of economic reform rather than demonstrating it was serious about getting the public finances into better shape.

He was commenting on an unprecedented level of advanced briefing from the government on what might be in next week's budget that merely spread uncertainty ahead of the event.

After hints that the government was prepared to abandon a pre-election pledge not to raise income taxes, it was revealed that they would not be going up after all in the face of a potential mutiny by its own MPs.

Another potential mutiny over harsh measures

Attention then abruptly switched to

immigration, where the government faces another potential mutiny over a range of harsh measures to curb the inflow of cross-Channel asylum seekers.

Ahead of yet another policy switch that was heavily trailed, **immigration minister Shabana Mahmood** spoke of the need to act in the face of “dark forces” stirring up anger over migration.

What followed was her announcement of an immigration crackdown that would see refugees who arrive on small boats having to wait up to 20 years for permanent settlement and face deportation if the situation in their home country was judged to have improved.



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Asylum seekers were warned they would have to surrender jewellery and other valuables to pay for accommodation they are placed in while they await a ruling on their leave to remain.

To some, it sounded as if the government were seeking to appease the “dark forces” rather than confront them.

“The rhetoric around these reforms encourages the same culture of divisiveness that sees racism and abuse growing in our communities,” **Tony Vaughan**, one of the new intake of Labour MPs, posted on X.

What's the good news?

So, returning to our concerned reader's opening question: what's the good news?

Perhaps it is that, as surveys such as More in Common's reveal, more Britons occupy what might be described as a mildly disgruntled middle ground than are attracted to political extremes.

Despite the gloom-mongering, most people continue to get on with their neighbours and society at large.

The best advice for doomsayers at home and abroad, who depict a crumbling Britain of warring factions, sinister foreigners and dysfunctional cities beset by crime, is that maybe they should get out more.