

# Forget Trump. Forget Johnson. Look to the future for responsible politicians

In these strange times, the hope is a new generation of activists and campaigners can bring about positive change



Environmental activist Greta Thunberg addresses the UN's Climate Action Summit (Image: AP)

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In hindsight if not actuality, not so long ago the day-to-day business of politics was relatively mundane.

Of course, all governments have their periods of personnel change, scandal and legislative difficulty, but by and large administrations have historically muddled through without impacting too much on the public consciousness.

Now though, since the seismic events of the second half of 2016 - that is to say the European referendum in the UK and the election of Donald Trump in the USA - we are living through a time when every hour, let alone every day, produces an event which, in times recently passed, would have dominated the news agenda for weeks and had serious repercussions for the political figures involved.

So here we are in a week when the US Democratic Party has initiated [an impeachment process](#) against the President of the United States and the Supreme Court in the UK has ruled that the Prime Minister unlawfully suspended Parliament, during the process of which he [provided advice to the Queen](#) which was “unlawful, void and of no effect”.

These are strange times - though perhaps not so strange for Messrs Trump and Johnson personally, whose political and private lives are, above all else, characterised by controversy and discord.

For Trump it's been a week like all the others, really - flagrant disrespect of established international institutions coupled with snide personal attacks on perceived rivals via Twitter.

On Monday, he briefly attended [\(he reportedly left after 15 minutes\)](#) the United Nations climate crisis summit in New York, where, before the conference started, the UN secretary general, [António Guterres stated](#) that the world was losing its battle with climate change and we were in the midst of an emergency.

Tellingly, Guterres also referenced the “fantastic leadership” of young climate activists who were forcing governments and citizens to sit up and take notice.

Which is where Greta Thunberg comes in.

Over the last year or so this young woman has become very successful at highlighting the seriousness of climate change and at galvanising opposition to current practices which exacerbate the problem.

In New York, [she addressed the delegation](#) (and world leaders) eloquently, passionately and unsparingly.

The speech attracted worldwide attention and much of the commentary around it concentrated, as ever, not on what Thunberg said, or the science that informed her address, but on her delivery (too serious and gloomy) or her age (16) or her “strangeness” due to pervasive developmental disorder (she has Asperger’s syndrome).

On Twitter, Trump led the mocking. Retweeting a video of Thunberg’s speech, [he wrote](#): “She seems like a very happy young girl looking forward to a bright and wonderful future. So nice to see!”

Thunberg is [consistently dismissed](#) in such malign ways. She happens to be young, female and autistic - all three of these factors are routinely used to diminish her personally and to invalidate the potency of what she communicates. More than this, she just does not fit in to the traditional patterns of what is expected from “someone like her”.

As author and Sunday Times columnist India Knight has written: “I think some people’s (men’s) unease with Greta Thunberg is that she rarely smiles. Girls and women are supposed to be smiley to put men at ease and appear emollient, and she’s just not playing.”

The tragedy of all this, aside from the attacks on Thunberg and the personal impact of which we can only guess at, is that the real issues get side-lined or ignored.

As I write this, the New York Times reports new UN research which says the Earth’s oceans are “under severe strain from climate change, threatening everything from the ability to harvest seafood to the well-being of hundreds of millions of people living along the coasts”.

As the Times makes clear, what’s important is that these findings are the results of research compiled from more than 700 studies conducted by more than 100 experts in their field. They are not, as critics of Thunberg would have us believe, the product of a little girl’s imagination.

But times they appear to be changing and much of the credit for such an organised, widespread opposition to climate change and its factors rests with Thunberg and her network of young activists.

Unbeaten and unbowed by criticism and ridicule from vested interests, last Friday’s support for the climate strike was a truly [local](#) and [global](#) success indicating that the next generation of politicians and law makers will be far more responsible than this one.

## 'Bombastic and evasive as ever'

[Press reaction to the Supreme Court ruling](#) that the Prime Minister unlawfully suspended Parliament was almost totally focussed on the travails of Boris Johnson.

The Guardian front page led with him “humiliated” and having misled the Queen, The Independent ran with “Humiliated PM refuses to resign” whilst The Times had a picture of Johnson typically furrowing his brow with the headline, “PM flies back to chaos”.

Most common was this idea of Mr Johnson’s personal humiliation, though I’ve my doubts about how valid this assumption is. From the interview excerpts I’ve seen, and the evidence of his Parliamentary performance on Wednesday night, Mr Johnson appears far from shame ridden and apologetic.

He’s been as bombastic and evasive as ever. The ultimate proof of humiliation of course, would be in resignation -- and there’s no sign of that.

Far more likely is that we are entering the next stage of the strategy, which is to position the PM as a man of our times standing up for democracy against a Parliament and establishment determined to stymie the “will of the people”,

Which is certainly how the Sun, Daily Mail and Daily Express see the Supreme Court ruling. The Sun’s front page on Wednesday, also with a punning headline meaningful to none under 50, proclaimed: “SUN READERS SLAM PROROGUE FARCE”.

The accompanying story said: “Sun readers reacted with fury yesterday... many blasted the ‘unelected’ judges and hailed Boris’ battle to deliver Brexit.”

Perhaps the Sun is on to something as what appears to be undeniable is Mr Johnson’s popularity with the electorate. [A YouGov poll published](#) on September 17 disclosed that “that the ongoing Brexit chaos” had not affected his approval figures which, at a positive approval rate of 38%, are slightly higher than when he came to power.

Let’s see how this is affected by the Supreme Court ruling and yet another performance in the House which illustrated his unfitness for office.

### **ALSO BY JOHN:**

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