

Welcome to the zombie apocalypse

By Dr Jacob Salder, Alliance Manchester Business School

“I’m at the stage where everything I thought meant something seems so unappealing “

Furniture, ‘Brilliant Mind’ (1986)

Just to warn you, this one’s going to get dark.

It seems clear now the English are getting pretty weary of lockdown and our slow saunter back to normality. From Bournemouth beach to unlicensed raves in Oldham and illegal camping in the Lake District, the removing of our figurative shackles has all too predictably been met with traditional English exceptionalism.

Personally, I became weary of the debacle way in advance of not only our totemic ‘independence day’ but the start of the whole furore. In truth, I lost interest back at the start of the year. Following the outbreak in China and then Italy, it was by February clear this was not going to be a zombie apocalypse. Those stricken would not return from the dead craving our flesh. Society would not descend into some apocalyptic nightmare. And the baseball bat I bought and duly wrapped with barbed wire would be surplus to requirement.

Approaching four months of lockdown has allowed ‘Lucille’ and I time to reflect. During the past 20 years we’ve seen growing interest for post-apocalyptic scenarios in film and television. Most times this is zombies (The Walking Dead, World War Z), but we also see extinction events (The Road), climate change (The Day After Tomorrow) and global pandemics (Contagion). In each of these dramas, the common theme that leads to our destruction is our greatest existential threat; apathy.

It is this apathy which is at the heart of our own zombie apocalypse consuming the UK since 2016. Those on the right focus incorrectly on ‘uncontrolled’ immigration and multi-culturalism as some nefarious disease infesting the nation and destroying our way of life. But the threat presented by our apathy is far more tangible, enabling the destabilising of one of the world’s oldest democracies and faith in the pillars of the state, ironically through the machinery of the state itself.

The success of the Leave campaign back in 2016 was seen as some radical move against the establishment and a revolution driven by ‘real people’ – often masquerading as anonymous Russian trolls – against an embedded elite. Ignoring well documented deception and illegality, what was spectacular about this revolution is there was nothing revolutionary about it. No ideas. No vision. No alternative proposition.

In the intervening years France has seen its own form of radical transformation. First the old guard was extinguished as *En Marche* took the Presidency and later the Government. More recently, a radical ‘green tsunami’ has occurred as the once marginalised Green party won major cities like Marseille, Lyon and Bordeaux in July’s municipal elections[\[1\]](#).

Whilst the French’s thirst for change and optimism for the future results in a bold transformation in political representation, English apathy has seen us fall asleep at the wheel. Dissatisfaction in the failings of the same old institutions has seen us turn blindly to these institutions to solve the very problems they created. Vision and ideology have been replaced with banner waving and propaganda. And adversity and resistance have retreated to starting a string of easily ignored petitions and appropriating social media to TYPE VERY LOUDLY!!!

We have recently seen the release of the long-suppressed Russia Report. Sadly for the Remain contingent, conclusive evidence of a contractual agreement between Boris Johnson and Vladimir Putin to subvert British democracy was not included. What was damning however was the security services assessment there was significant risk of foreign states interfering in British electoral matters, and the apathy of successive PMs to consider this legitimate and requiring action. Instead we get the traditional apathetic English shrug: “Oh, it’s probably going to be fine...”.

Such a dereliction of duty extends more insidiously through our embedded political debates. The removal of scrutiny as a core role of both Government and Parliament plays very neatly into the plausible deniability of actions for the executive and their sponsors^[iii]. And whilst ‘world-leading’ rhetoric is used to gaslight Parliament into casting away its sovereignty regarding trade deal scrutiny – at which the EU must be pissing themselves considering their internal scrutiny model which saw Wallonia hold up the Canada trade deal^[iii] – this gaslighting is normalised as emasculated government members outside the cabinet propagate their own forms of misinformation and deceit.

What this fundamentally represents is what I refer to as the ‘shaggification’ of politics. Those of a certain age will remember Shaggy – Mr Boombastic – and more specifically his song ‘It Wasn’t Me’. Here, Shaggy offers advice to a colleague caught *in flagrante* by his girlfriend, encouraging him to just say ‘it wasn’t me’. And if he repeats this long enough, with enough conviction, he will be absolved. And thus slogans, lies, and *bons mots* perpetuated by a mix of unchallenged platforms ranging from the Daily Mail to Twitter to the BBC beat evidence, detail and pragmatism. The outcome is a lack of any sort of will to compromise and build consensus. And this leads us – as my CBS colleague David Hearne argued recently^[iv] – to a political, economic, and constitutional crisis which realistically will see the separation of the UK and a further lost decade after the debacle of the 2010’s.

So, our own form of zombie apocalypse brings down – or rather up – the walls. And it has led us here. To a position where an unelected adviser wields more power seemingly than the elected officials he is supposed to support. Where a Government ceases its line of being ‘economic with the truth’ and institutionalises deceit. Where they champion the democratic process whilst pursuing a line to strip out accountability and scrutiny, be it withholding public health data^[v], bypassing the devolved administrations^[vi], or even marginalising Parliament itself^[vii].

And where opponents of such a confederacy of dunces spend more time celebrating themselves for their liberal sensibilities, steadfast commitment, and adroit capabilities in creating petitions and participating in polite marches than actually forming any functional resistance. Instead from the sidelines we cheer a polite and effective QC as if humiliating the PM once a week is tantamount to bringing down a government with an 80-seat majority. We tweet our contempt as if shame and conscience may suddenly manifest amongst the wanton. And we boast the enduring tribalism resulting in a fragmented social liberal contingent unfit for a demonstrably ineffective electoral system.

All these failings would, under normal circumstance, simply be food for our celebrated tendency for self-deprecation. That most British of traditions giving us comedy greats like ‘Yes Minister’ ‘Have I Got News for You’ and ‘The Thick of It’. But this is now serious. All the signs illustrate that post-Brexit Britain (if it remains that) will not be a nation of greater democratic devolution and accountability, of greater collective prosperity. It will instead continue its hundred-year trend of greater centralisation, relying on core Conservative values of feudalism and cronyism. It will employ the rhetoric of the people of a ‘great’ country whilst eroding rights, benefits, and services. And it will push the UK – or what remains of it – into another decade of soul-searching leaving it again the ‘sick man of Europe’.

And realistically, I see no way out here. No course of action where the current Government does not alienate the larger part of the population unconvinced by their agenda. No plan that does not increase calls for the union's dissolution through Scottish independence and Irish reunification. No hope of an alternative party offering any effective resistance let alone hope of forming a government. And no future simply in England's dreaming. Little wonder so many are now leaving the UK [\[viii\]](#).

We have sleepwalked into our descent. So, well done England.

"No future, no future..."

[\[i\] https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2020-07-01/-green-tsunami-sweeps-climate-focused-french-mayors-into-power](https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2020-07-01/-green-tsunami-sweeps-climate-focused-french-mayors-into-power)

[\[ii\] https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/dark-money-investigations/revealed-russian-donors-have-stepped-tory-funding/](https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/dark-money-investigations/revealed-russian-donors-have-stepped-tory-funding/); <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/conservative-party-ministers-bankrolled-by-donors-linked-to-russia-2hm5jhwpx>

[\[iii\] https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-37749236](https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-37749236)

[\[iv\] https://centreforbrexitstudiesblog.wordpress.com/2020/07/16/the-great-british-break-up-redux/](https://centreforbrexitstudiesblog.wordpress.com/2020/07/16/the-great-british-break-up-redux/)

[\[v\] https://www.bmj.com/content/bmj/370/bmj.m2814.full.pdf](https://www.bmj.com/content/bmj/370/bmj.m2814.full.pdf)

[\[vi\] https://www.standard.co.uk/news/politics/brexit-stormont-holyrood-devolution-a4339571.html](https://www.standard.co.uk/news/politics/brexit-stormont-holyrood-devolution-a4339571.html)

[\[vii\] https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2020/jun/02/uk-government-accused-of-power-grab-over-redrawing-of-boundaries](https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2020/jun/02/uk-government-accused-of-power-grab-over-redrawing-of-boundaries); <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/brexit-trade-bill-parliament-vote-mps-eu-leave-a9629396.html>

[\[viii\] https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/aug/02/brexit-fuels-brain-drain-as-skilled-britons-head-to-the-eu?CMP=Share_iOSApp_Other](https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/aug/02/brexit-fuels-brain-drain-as-skilled-britons-head-to-the-eu?CMP=Share_iOSApp_Other)