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Opinion

Under Boris Johnson, corruption is taking hold in Britain

Gina Miller



Cronyism is rife, our system of checks and balances is being dismantled, and ordinary people will soon start to suffer

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Many people view the government's handling of Covid-19 and the Brexit negotiations as incompetent and lacking common sense. But beneath all the controversies about test and trace, PPE and deal or no deal, what if there is an ideological agenda being cunningly and cynically executed during this time of crisis?

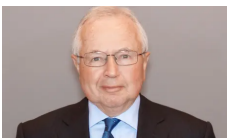
Boris Johnson once described Covid-19 as an “invisible mugger”. I’m starting to wonder if that is how we will come to see his government’s impact on our country. That’s because Johnson has used his parliamentary majority, and the Conservatives’ innumerable business and media friends, to systematically relieve us of our democratic checks and balances, and even our freedoms.

Consider Johnson’s actions: he’s been willing to resort to emergency legislation to avoid awkward questions or debate in the House of Commons; clauses in the internal market bill would have allowed him to break international law; his covert intelligence bill (known as the “[licence to kill](#)” bill) implicitly permits undercover agents to break the law if they perceive a threat to national security.

Further to this, he has used hundreds of statutory instruments (which allow him to evade parliamentary scrutiny), and introduced a [judicial review](#), aimed at denying access to the courts for those who wish to challenge the government, and giving the prime minister the power to appoint judges. And now he has set up a [review of the Human Rights Act](#). In addition to all these, Johnson has taken powers on himself under the [Coronavirus Emergency Act](#) - a power grab on a scale unseen in this country for 400 years.

Britain has not only operated for centuries on the basis of checks and balances, but earned a global reputation based on them. It is significant that the supreme court, now in Johnson’s line of fire, found for me and my legal teams in our [actions to uphold parliamentary sovereignty](#), first against the government of Theresa May and then his.

We have already witnessed how Johnson’s ministers refuse to publish reports, Covid procurement contracts, Brexit impact studies. They even scorn scrutiny by parliamentary committees: the chancellor, Rishi Sunak, refused to appear before the Treasury select committee, and the business secretary, Alok Sharma, shunned the Business select committee.



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Johnson’s is emphatically not a “one nation” Conservative government, but is being guided by principles of isolationism, authoritarianism and economic elitism. His ideas can be found in a booklet published in 2012 called [Britannia Unchained](#) that was once seen on the floor of his car. Its authors - Kwasi Kwarteng, Priti Patel, Dominic Raab, Chris Skidmore and Liz Truss - spoke scornfully of Britain being a bloated state, with too many taxes and regulations for businesses and employers, and of our workers being “among the worst idlers in the world”. All of its authors have served in Johnson’s government.

In 2016 Sunak, then a backbench MP, wrote a [report](#) for the rightwing Centre for Policy Studies stating that “free ports” - areas with little or no tax - were the way to drive economic growth and “re-connect Britain with its proud maritime history”. He overlooked how their lack of regulations encourages tax

abuses, organised crime and money laundering.

Where there is no transparency, corruption and cronyism soon fester. The prime minister's fiancée can nowadays [appoint friends to well-paid government roles](#) without even having to advertise them.

Under Johnson we will see a new kind of Britain - perhaps quite soon merely the rump nation of England - with reduced corporation tax, income tax and social security, fewer worker protections, and the turbo-charged privatisation of our public services, ending the state as we once knew it.

It is not the British way to make a fuss, and no doubt there are those who think even now that the government taking it upon itself to break the law in "very specific and limited ways" isn't something to be too concerned about. But soon the pages and pages of legislation that have escaped parliamentary scrutiny and merely been rubber-stamped will start to impact on ordinary people's lives.

We may soon want to protest but find even our rights to do that have been curtailed. Beyond that, there will come the numbing and bleak realisation that Johnsonism is ultimately Darwinism: ours will be a country where only the strongest and richest prosper, and where those outside their circle eventually realise the depth of the corruption of our country, and how much has been stolen by this invisible mugger.

- Gina Miller is a businesswoman and transparency activist who led the legal action that prevented [Boris Johnson](#) proroguing parliament

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