There is continuing conservative support for climate action. Not so much here, of course, but in the UK. The British government is firmly in the grip of the Conservative Party. Prime Minister Boris Johnson is no Donald Trump, but he does have at least a whiff of Trumpiness about him. Like the GOP, the Tories have moved somewhat away from their traditional constituencies to embrace working class voters on an anti-internationalist platform. And yet, the UK remains firmly committed to climate action, in a way that would be unthinkable for American conservatives. Indeed, the UK remains a leader on the subject.

The Climate Change Act of 2008 was amended in 2019 under a coalition government of the Conservatives and their North Irish allies. Rather than weakening the 2008 law, the amendment set a target of net-zero GHG emissions by 2050.

In 2022, the government adopted a new energy policy to combat dependence on Russian oil. The short-term goal is 95% low carbon energy by 2030. The plan calls for 24 Gigawatts of nuclear power, involving the construction of up to eight new nuclear plants on existing sites. It also calls for 50 Gigawatts of offshore wind.

Some aspects of the new plan have drawn criticism. Onshore wind turbines, apparently are anathema to Tory squires; perhaps they get in the way of the grouse shooting. In any event, they aren't part of the plan. The plan also overlooks the importance of energy efficiency measures like home insulation. There's only a very tentative embrace of solar power — maybe too many places for the grouse to hide! And the plan also calls for increased oil and gas production, perhaps in the hope of heading off complaints about rising energy costs. While it's not at all ideal, it's still far better than we could expect from their American counterparts.

Brexit represents the kind of nationalist populism that we often find in the GOP, and a "hard" Brexit is Johnson's biggest claim to fame. As a result of Brexit, the UK is no longer a part of the EU ETS Cap-and-Trade system. But Brexit so far has had minimal impact on British environmental laws. The UK has adopted its own environmental trading system modelled after the EU's, with the same regulated sectors and carbon caps. Prices in the UK market have closely tracked the EU. Interestingly, Northern Ireland remains in the EU market. The very phrase "cap and trade" seems to make American conservatives break out in hives.

There are many differences between British society and politics and those in the U.S., so it's difficult to say precisely what accounts for the difference. One factor may be the very different rules about political campaigns in the UK. Campaign

spending is very strictly regulated, and political ads on TV are banned. This makes it harder for special interests like the oil industry to have leverage over candidates. The UK also doesn’t have political primaries in which candidates compete to attract extremist voters. Or maybe the British temperament just isn’t as inclined to populist excesses. Whatever the reason, UK conservatives seem to have generally eschewed the kind of anti-environmentalism that so often emerges in today’s GOP.

As in the US, subnational governments play an important role in climate policy in the UK. I’ll post about that next week.