

Are the Conservatives Really the Adults in the Room? | A Structural Examination of a Political Myth

Adam Tugwell | 7 October 2026



Since the **October 2026 Conservative Party Conference**, a familiar line has resurfaced in political commentary: the Conservatives look like “the adults in the room” again.

Kemi Badenoch’s keynote speech - and the publication of her ideological document, ***The Right Way*** - were presented as evidence of a renewed seriousness.

Commentators noted that her tone, discipline, and clarity contrasted sharply with the noise elsewhere in British politics.

But the idea that the Conservative Party represents adulthood in British politics is not supported by the structural reality they face. They are preparing to operate a system that is failing, not preparing to govern through the paradigm shift that is already underway.

The Conservatives are not the adults in the room. They are the **last technicians of a dying operating system**, still convinced that competence means managing the machinery more tightly, even as the machinery itself fails.

And this problem is not confined to the Conservative Party. It is shared across the entire right.

1. The UK's crisis is structural, not ideological

The problems facing the United Kingdom today are not the result of a single party, a single leader, or a single policy cycle. They are the result of an economy-based paradigm that has reached the end of its useful life.

Across government, markets, public services, and institutions, the same symptoms appear:

- tools that no longer work
- systems that no longer respond
- incentives that distort outcomes
- markets that react unpredictably
- public services that cannot deliver
- communities that feel abandoned
- political actors who cannot adapt

This is not a left-right problem. It is a **system problem**.

And system problems cannot be solved by:

- left-wing managerialism
- centrist technocracy
- populist disruption
- cultural reaction
- neoliberal acceleration

They can only be solved by people who understand:

- locality
- community
- stewardship
- continuity
- identity
- responsibility
- self-governance

These are conservative principles in the *true* sense - not the party-political sense.

Which is why the answer must come from the right. But not necessarily from the Conservative Party.

2. Why the Conservative Party cannot be the adults in the room

The Conservative Party is not failing because it is conservative. It is failing because it is **paradigm-blind**.

It is trapped inside a worldview that assumes:

- markets are the ultimate arbiters of reality
- growth is the measure of success
- deregulation is the path to prosperity
- fiscal discipline is moral discipline
- centralised management is competence
- political messaging is leadership
- continuity of the system is the goal

These assumptions once made sense. They no longer do.

The Conservatives are using **broken tools** inside a **broken system**, guided by **broken incentives**, responding to **broken signals**, and trapped in **broken feedback loops**.

This is not adulthood. This is **institutionalised adolescence** - a political culture that confuses rigidity with responsibility and obedience with wisdom.

3. The 2026 Conference: seriousness by contrast, not substance

The October 2026 Conference was designed to project maturity:

- Andrew Griffith's "one tax cut per Budget" pledge

- The deregulation agenda (housing, planning, environment)
- The anti-net-zero pivot
- The “Britannia Shield” defence announcement
- Laura Trott’s anti-activism education stance
- Jeremy Clarkson’s rural-identity cameo

These were framed as grown-up realism, contrasted with Labour’s internal confusion and the volatility of Reform and Restore.

This is where the “adult” narrative emerged.

But seriousness in tone is not seriousness in structure. The conference showcased competence within the paradigm, not competence beyond it.

4. *The Right Way*: preparing for government, not governance

Badenoch’s document, *The Right Way*, was presented as:

- “the bedrock of Conservative policy”
- “the foundation for government”
- “the serious plan for Britain”
- “the right way to govern”

Commentators echoed the sentiment, describing it as a return to grown-up conservatism.

But *The Right Way* is not a plan for governance. It is a plan for operating the existing system.

It is:

- a Thatcherite reboot
- a neoliberal acceleration
- market appeasement
- system maintenance
- managerial discipline

It is **preparing for government**, not **preparing for governance**.

This distinction is critical.

5. Government vs governance: the hinge of the argument

Preparing for government

means preparing to:

- operate the existing system
- manage the existing machinery
- use the existing tools
- reassure markets
- maintain the paradigm
- look competent inside a failing structure

Preparing for governance

means preparing to:

- confront systemic collapse
- break the market–politics symbiosis
- rebuild institutions
- decentralise power
- restore community autonomy
- govern beyond neoliberalism
- lead through paradigm change

The Conservative Party is doing the first. The country needs the second.

This is why they cannot be the adults in the room. They are preparing to run a system that no longer works.

6. The markets–politics symbiosis: the real enemy of adulthood

The most dangerous structural problem in British politics is the codependent relationship between markets and government.

The Conservatives believe adulthood means:

- pleasing markets
- calming markets
- signalling to markets

- obeying markets
- reassuring markets

But markets are not adults. Markets are algorithms reacting to signals.

The Conservatives are trapped in a feedback loop:

- They use neoliberal tools.
- Markets expect neoliberal tools.
- Markets punish deviation.
- Conservatives panic.
- Conservatives double down.
- The system worsens.
- Markets panic again.

This is not adulthood. This is fear dressed up as maturity.

In 2022 Liz Truss did not break the system. She exposed it.

Her downfall was not a failure of ideology. It was a failure of paradigm awareness.

7. The wider right: unity without understanding is not a solution

The emergence of initiatives like [VotingRight.uk](https://www.votingright.uk) shows how deeply the right recognises its fragmentation.

To many, such platforms will sound like a solution:

- stop vote-splitting
- unify the right
- create a coherent alternative
- restore seriousness
- bring “adults” together

But unity does not fix blindness. Unity amplifies it.

A coalition of the right - no matter the dynamics - cannot solve a structural crisis if it is still operating inside the same failing worldview.

If the people elected are still:

- market-obedient

- neoliberal in instinct
- centralising in practice
- managerial in mindset
- paradigm-blind
- system-first rather than people-first
- trapped in the markets–politics symbiosis

then the outcome is the same:

They will govern the reality they believe exists, not the reality that actually does.

VotingRight.uk is a tactical response to a structural crisis. It cannot succeed on its own terms – no matter how well intended it may be.

The right must come together - but not around electoral arithmetic. It must come together around paradigm awareness.

8. The right must come together - but not around the Conservative Party

The solution requires:

- conservatives who understand community
- conservatives who understand stewardship
- conservatives who understand responsibility
- conservatives who understand identity
- conservatives who understand continuity
- conservatives who understand locality
- conservatives who understand governance

These people exist across the right, not just inside the Conservative Party.

The Conservative Party is not the container for the solution. Nor is any single right-wing electoral alliance.

The right must come together outside the party structure, not inside it.

9. The real adult in the room will not be a manager - but a breaker or a builder

The next real leader will be someone who:

- recognises the paradigm is ending
- understands the markets are not adults
- sees the system is collapsing
- prioritises people over systems
- breaks the political–market symbiosis
- rebuilds from community upward
- leads through collapse rather than managing decline

This is the adulthood the country needs. This is the adulthood the Conservative Party cannot provide. This is the adulthood the right must rediscover. This is the adulthood that requires paradigm awareness. This is the adulthood that requires governance, not government.

10. A final note on political time, uncertainty, and the nature of paradigm change

This position statement is written **immediately following the Conservative Party Conference in October 2026**, at a moment when political narratives are still settling and the implications of *The Right Way* are being interpreted in real time. Political conditions change quickly. What appears clear today may look very different in a matter of months, weeks, or even days. Any analysis of the present moment can only ever be a snapshot of where things seem capable of going from here.

It is important to recognise that **any political party - left, right, or as yet unknown - could be the one that eventually experiences the lucid moment required to see the full reality of the situation the UK now faces**. Paradigm shifts do not respect party lines. They do not follow ideological loyalties. They do not emerge from the places commentators expect. They emerge when circumstances force clarity.

If and when that moment arrives, the political actor who grasps it will not succeed because they are Conservative, Labour, Reform, Restore, or anything else. They will succeed because they have understood the structural nature of the crisis and acted upon it.

And whatever form that response takes, **conservatism - in its truest sense - will sit at its core**. Not the market-first, system-first, centralising version that dominates party politics today. But the deeper conservatism rooted in:

- stewardship
- locality

- continuity
- responsibility
- community
- identity
- people-first governance

This form of conservatism is not exclusive to the right. It is present, often unspoken, at the foundation of anything genuinely progressive that puts people first. It is the shared ground beneath political traditions that currently see themselves as opposites.

For that reason, the eventual solution is likely to bring together people who today believe they sit at entirely different points on the political spectrum - people who currently focus on difference rather than commonality, and who have been conditioned to see each other as opponents rather than potential collaborators. Circumstances are almost certain to demand this perspective shift before long.

Only when that shift occurs - when the political imagination flips from division to shared purpose - are we likely to see the real answers begin to emerge.

This piece should therefore be read not as a prediction, but as a structural reflection on the moment we are in: a moment defined by paradigm blindness, institutional inertia, and the illusion of adulthood in politics. A moment that will change. A moment that must change. And a moment whose eventual transformation will depend on people who can see beyond the boundaries of their own political identities and recognise the deeper reality that now confronts us all.

Further Information

To explore more of Adam Tugwell's writing, including the online edition of this post, please visit:

www.adamtugwell.blog

Copyright Notice

Copyright ©2026 Adam Tugwell

All rights reserved.

This publication reflects the personal experience, views, and opinions of the Author.

No part of this work may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, transmitted, adapted, translated, or otherwise used in any form or by any means - electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise - without prior written permission from the Author.

The Author asserts the moral right to be identified as the creator of this work and to object to any distortion or misrepresentation of it.

This work may be downloaded and stored for personal, non-commercial use only.

Any unauthorised reproduction, plagiarism, or misattribution constitutes a violation of copyright.

The Author accepts no responsibility for, and makes no endorsement of, content accessed through external links, PDFs, digital platforms, organisations, or individuals referenced herein.

Readers remain solely responsible for evaluating the accuracy and suitability of all external material.

This copyright notice shall be governed by and construed in accordance with the laws of England and Wales.