

Has Badenoch got a hope?

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I should preface what follows by making it clear that Kemi Badenoch would not have been my choice for leader of the Tory Party.

Let me also be honest and say nor would Robert Jenrick have been my choice. Nor would any of the other candidates have been favoured by me. So, maybe you can say that I am not the person to comment on the prospects of the Tory Party. Alternatively, you can say that without skin in the game, that is exactly what qualifies me to do so. I take the second view.

So, let me be quite clear about that view. It is that Badenoch has no hope of succeeding as Tory Party leader.

A leader of a political party has to appeal to at least four constituencies simultaneously:

- * Their parliamentary colleagues
- * The media
- * The electorate
- * Their party membership.

Those are ranked in broad order, reflecting the fact, for example, that after yesterday, Badenoch can take the Tory party faithful for granted for some time to come, but keeping her MPs on side is going to be very much harder. Remember, she never succeeded in winning the support of a majority of them in any ballot on her way to becoming leader.

Remember, too, that they are the constituency by far the most likely to topple her. The history of interim leaders of the Tory Party is littered with the memories of those who arrived with high hopes and limited support who never stayed long enough to make much of a mark on history. Iain Duncan Smith comes most readily to mind, but there are many others. That is where Badenoch's greatest threat is.

And for her to assume the the media will like her would be unwise. The media have products to sell. They will only support Badenoch if what she has to say positions well alongside what they think appeals to their market. So far, many of her more extreme rants (and there have been many of them) might work well on GB News and the Express, but they will be much harder to sell to other outlets. Unless she seriously moderates her position, and I suspect the exact opposite will be the case, then to presume she is going to be popular with the media would be foolhardy.

The electorate is, however, her hardest audience to crack. There are maybe 20 per cent of the electorate who will love her far-right views. The trouble for her is she is competing with Reform for their allegiance. Much else of what she might say, most of which is anti-government and anti-the provision of support to people who might need it is going to be a hard sell to almost any audience when they saw what fourteen years of what she thinks to be a lukewarm version of this policy did to public services. They really are not going to be persuaded that a full-on assault on those services will produce better outcomes.

This means that whilst Badenoch is a clear fit for the messaging to the right of her party and the fringes beyond that, how she can simultaneously also construct messages to appeal to much of the rest of the electorate, with all the nuances that will require to keep up pressure on multiple fronts, is very hard to imagine. I think that the chance that she will develop successful attack lines against Labour, LibDems, the SNP and Greens, all of whom pose threats to her Party, is very unlikely. I doubt she will even manage it with Labour, but if she did that, the rest might prove almost impossible to attack at the same time.

This is, I suggest, a task beyond her wit because her wit will always be to tack right when the reality is that the electorate wants politics to tack left to deliver what people expect from government now. I cannot see how she can resolve that.

So, how long will she last? I suspect she will be gone before the next election. But, if the Tories were unwise enough to keep her, she would be gone the day after that election is declared.

The ever-diminishing number of Tory party members in the UK (down 25% since 2022) might think Badenoch answers some questions they think are relevant. Very few others will.