

# Badenoch's Right Way is wrong

Published: October 6, 2026, 6:04 am

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Kemi Badenoch has set out her vision for a new Conservatism in 'The Right Way'. Its central argument is that government should do less while individuals, families, communities and businesses take greater responsibility. In this video, I explain why I think that argument is fundamentally flawed, and just wrong.

Badenoch argues for lower taxes, less government spending, less regulation and greater reliance on markets and individual responsibility. But I argue that responsibility is only meaningful when people have the resources and security required to exercise it.

People need decent incomes, secure employment, affordable housing, healthcare, education, transport and protection against risks they cannot reasonably manage alone. Reducing government provision does not make those needs disappear.

There is also a problem of power. Markets do not bring everyone together on equal terms, but Badenoch seems to believe that they do. Employers can have more power than workers, landlords more power than tenants, and large corporations more power than individual consumers. Removing regulation can therefore increase rather than reduce these inequalities.

I also challenge Badenoch's definition of freedom. Freedom cannot simply mean freedom from government. Someone unable to afford their rent, obtain healthcare or challenge an employer has few meaningful choices, however small the state might be.

Real freedom means the ability to do things, and that requires security, resources and the opportunity to make genuine choices. Individual responsibility therefore depends upon collective provision rather than being an alternative to it.

Badenoch believes previous Conservative governments were not conservative enough. I argue that pushing still further towards markets, deregulation and individual responsibility fails to answer the most important question: who provides the foundations people need to live genuinely free and secure lives?

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AB7Nid-tTFA?si=eHg48xUm9bNXfPA0>

This is the audio version:

[https://www.podbean.com/player-v2/?i=z5k4j-1b787c8-pb&from=pb6admin&share=1&download=1&rtl=0&font=Arial&skin=f6f6f6&font-color=&logo\\_link=episode\\_page&btn-skin=c73a3a](https://www.podbean.com/player-v2/?i=z5k4j-1b787c8-pb&from=pb6admin&share=1&download=1&rtl=0&font=Arial&skin=f6f6f6&font-color=&logo_link=episode_page&btn-skin=c73a3a)

This is the transcript:

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There is a fundamental flaw in Kemi Badenoch's new Conservatism.

The Right Way is the publication that Kemi Badenoch has produced that attempts to redefine the principles of Conservatism. It's been published for the Tory Party Conference this week, and in it she says that government should do less and individuals, families and communities, plus businesses, of course, should do more.

That sounds like a coherent political philosophy from a Conservative perspective, but that is all that we can say about it because it is built upon assumptions about markets, power, responsibility, and freedom that she never justifies and which simply do not stack. Those flaws, which she does not mention, are fundamental and undermine her argument. So what I want to look at in this video is: what is wrong with The Right Way?

And The Right Way is intended to reshape conservatism. There's no apology about that. She is echoing Sir Keith Joseph's publication, The Right Approach, that came out in 1976 and which sought to define Thatcherism as it became. And like Sir Keith Joseph, and like Margaret Thatcher, Kemi Badenoch explicitly says that principle must come before policy.

Now I have no problem with that idea if the principles are soundly based. But her defining principle is that government is more often the problem than the solution when it comes to the supply of a fair society, and that principle drives everything else that she proposes.

Badenoch wants considerably less government in the economy, for example. She says that businesses create growth and government does not. And so apparently healthcare, social care, education, justice, and so much more that is provided by government in this country, none of them apparently add value. That is what Badenoch is saying.

And at the same time, she's saying, selling completely useless tat is of value. But the consequence of her argument is that she says that governments should tax less, spend less, borrow less, and most especially regulate less, at least when it comes to business. Employment rights are presented as impediments to hiring. Public ownership is rejected in favour of private ownership and competition. And she says individuals and businesses should take much greater responsibility for their own well-being and fortunes.

But Badenoch does, despite all of this, not actually want a weak state. She wants the state to be weaker when confronting economic power, but she wants it to exercise considerably more power over people. This is the paradox inside her paper.

That is apparent when she comes to talk about policing borders, immigration, and national identity, on all of which she apes the far right and their toxic policies of division based upon hate and 'othering' those people who she does not like, most of whom have darker skin or were not born in the UK.

Leaving the European Court of Human Rights and repealing the Human Rights Act are part of that agenda, in the process, directly contradicting the thinking of Winston Churchill, who was a major exponent of the European Court of Human Rights, because he saw what happened when human rights were taken away in Nazi Germany, and he wanted to protect people across Europe from that fate, but Badenoch wants to expose us to those risks all over again.

This then is a smaller economic state combined with a more coercive social state.

But the real problem in this whole policy document is what Badenoch leaves out of what she says. I've always realised that when you look at a policy document of this sort, the most important thing to do is to look at what is not said. And what Badenoch does not say is that if people are to take responsibility, they must have the means to do so.

They have to, if they are to be responsible for their own fortunes, have secure incomes, decent work, and affordable housing. They also require healthcare, education, transport, energy, and legal protection, none of which can be supplied by any one person acting on their own.

And they also need protection against risks they cannot reasonably manage alone. This is a concept that has been understood for centuries. The whole basis of the insurance industry was founded on that principle, and so was the welfare state.

But none of these things appears as ideas because she claims that government should withdraw from responsibility in this document, which she calls The Right Way, and which I would more accurately describe as The Wrong Way because her direction of travel blows against that of history, and that which says it is the job of the state to protect people and to provide the underpinning on which this basis of security can be

provided, which she wants to take away.

And in all of its claims, The Right Way does also ignore inequalities of power. Markets are not places where everyone meets on equal terms, as Badenoch assumes. She has read the theory of perfect competition, which underpins the right-wing fixation with markets and their belief that they produce optimal outcomes in society, all on the basis of assumptions which have never held true in any society that has ever existed, including that of the UK in the 21st century.

And so she ignores the fact that employers usually have more bargaining power than individual employees in this country.

She also ignores the fact that landlords frequently have more power than their tenants.

And she also ignores the fact that large corporations can dominate consumers, workers, and even, through their lobbying, government.

And what she also ignores is the fact that removing regulation and employment protection can increase these inequalities, which I must presume, as a consequence, Badenoch either desires or to which she's willing to turn a blind eye.

In either case, this is a recipe for increasing economic inequality in this country, increasing the power of the already powerful and undermining the well-being of those who need protection.

But most especially, Badenoch ignores something that is really important, and that is that markets are not designed to meet need. Markets allocate resources according to purchasing power, and what we know is that purchasing power in this country is very unfairly allocated. We have significant differences in spending power as a result of income inequality in this country. We have even greater disparity of wealth, giving rise to significant disparity in the way in which things like housing, for example, are allocated, with many very wealthy people owning a great deal of property, much of it buy-to-let, and vast numbers of people having no access to a home at all.

Needing a home does not create effective demand without the money to pay for it. This is a point that Badenoch just ignores. If you haven't got money, you can't express a vote in the marketplace. And the same is true of food, energy, healthcare, and social care. If the government retreats, those needs will still exist.

The Right Way does not then explain how those needs will be met. It's apparent that Badenoch does not even care if they are. She's not interested in meeting need. It appears her goal is the creation of a society of alienated people split between a few haves and a great many have-nots. That is what her recipe will deliver, whether that is her intention or not. And as she's a politician, I'm entitled to assume of her that what she implies is what she means.

And what Badenoch also ignores is that government withdrawal does not remove responsibility. The work of care that this society depends upon will still have to be done, whether the government does it or not. But that means that families must have the time, the money, and the emotional resources to provide the care that we know some people need.

It will also require that communities have the institutions capable of supporting people, and that charities and voluntary organisations must somehow fill the remaining gaps.

Badenoch simply assumes that this collective capacity will exist. I do not believe that. It does not exist at present. Government withdrawing will not create it. Her model makes assumptions then about how we will provide care in the future when people will not have the resources to do so. The risk that some will go without will be extraordinarily high on the basis of her Conservative approach to freedom.

And her model also makes heroic assumptions about business. It requires employers to behave fairly when employment protection is weakened. It requires that businesses must avoid exploiting their market power when the mechanisms to prevent them doing so are removed.

And all of this will be happening when she's saying that personal self-interest or corporate self-interest is what must drive society. But at the same time, she's saying that somehow this must not be translated into political and social domination.

That paradox is not resolved within the document. She wants social responsibility, and at the same time, she wants people to maximise their incomes by treating themselves as the epicentre of their universes.

There is no evidence that any market yet exists that produces these outcomes. The exact opposite is more likely. She is creating a charter for abuse. The protection she wants to remove exist because they were needed. She wants to be rid of them. Abuse is the inevitable consequence.

And anyway, individual responsibility does depend upon collective provision. That's because the reality is that individual responsibility requires that people have resources. They cannot manage their risks if they have not got those resources. Care, infrastructure and essential services have to come from somewhere, and Badenoch assumes that individual responsibility will create them, but she never explains how that will happen and who will actually provide.

And this logic, this failure to consider the consequences of what she claims, underpins everything that Badenoch is saying. It particularly undermines her concept of freedom.

She treats freedom largely as freedom from government. But the person who is unable to pay their rent is not in any way meaningfully free. And someone who is frightened of

losing their job and has no protection has very limited choices, while someone unable to obtain healthcare because they do not have money is not liberated by lower taxes.

Real freedom requires the ability to have access to resources, security and genuine choices; the freedom to do things, in other words. But those are not the freedoms that Badenoch is talking about. Nothing in this document talks about how those freedoms might be created. All she talks about is the freedom of those who already have resources, security, and genuine choices to be rid of government. That's her only concern, and that is why The Right Way fails.

Badenoch says in this document, and it is quite extraordinary for this reason, that Conservative governments failed from 2010 to 2024, ignoring the fact, of course, that she was a minister in some of those governments. Her argument is that they were not Conservative enough. Remember, Boris Johnson wasn't Conservative enough. Liz Truss was not Conservative enough. That means Theresa May was not Conservative enough. She says they did not meet her criterion of being Conservative.

She therefore proposes still more reliance on markets and on individual responsibility. But responsibility requires people to have firm ground on which to stand, and The Right Way never explains who will provide that firm ground.

That is what is missing from Badenoch's new Conservatism. There are no foundations to this idea. There is no basis within it for the creation of the prosperity that this country needs. It is all about freedom for a few at cost to the many.

It is a recipe for disaster for a society. What this document says is that there is no such thing as society, and in that sense, Badenoch is an heir to Thatcher, but Thatcher failed and so will Badenoch, and it's our job to keep her away from government, if this is her vision of what it's going to be all about.

That's my view. What's yours? You may disagree. If you do, give an answer in our poll down below; the option of disagreeing will be built into it. And please let us have your comments. We do now analyse these. Please do tell us what you think because that shapes our opinion with regard to the creation of future videos. Please do subscribe to the channel. Please do like this video. Please do share it. And if you're so inclined and want to hear more like this, please do make us a donation. There's a link below to our Ko-fi button, and that will give you the opportunity to support our work. Thank you.

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Poll

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