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# **CONSERVATISM AND RADICALISM**

**THREE INTERNATIONAL ROLE MODELS  
FOR AN ADRIFT BRITISH CONSERVATIVE PARTY**

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## Foreword

The British Conservative Party lost direction, lost its sense of purpose, lost public support ... and lost power.

Under a new leader, it is now – with painful slowness – reassessing its policies, but also making the first moves to come to terms with its mistakes over its period when in government. A policy review has begun, albeit with the speed, noise and alacrity of old plumbing. But what will it deliver, and what assessments will it reach about the cul-de-sacs British Conservatism has turned down over the last twenty years? Finding answers to those challenges will determine whether or not it survives this new age.

As the party reaches for those answers, the wider international scene finds itself awash with vibrant radicalism and charged populism. The two are interconnected, because democratic radicalism is popular. Politicians who acknowledge problems rather than hide them, spokesmen who come up with ideas to fix failures rather than cover them up - these are fresh concepts to many members of the public. Voters aren't stupid. They can see that systems are broken, not least the management of immigration and making criminals pay. 'It's too hard to fix' is not a good enough answer in a democracy.

The election of Donald Trump as US President is only one marker of the swing in the public mood. Other striking political leaders in recent years have emerged around the world, who have put their finger on the pulse of local public concerns and have come up with solutions. They deserve study.

Whether their policies can be replicated in the UK is a critical question. But if they are indeed sources of transferrable inspiration, and they can fix our problems in this country too, then politicians of all parties should take note. Because electoral success will follow for those who convincingly embrace them. Those who do not face annihilation.

# Javier Milei of Argentina

By Ian Bettles

As hard as it is to imagine now, at the start of the twentieth century Argentina was one of the wealthiest countries in the world. Its GDP per capita was similar to that of the United States, Germany, France and other rich Western European countries, with wages not far off those in the UK at the time. The French even coined a phrase for it - "*Il est riche comme un Argentin!*" - 'as rich as an Argentine'.

Economists remain fascinated by the Argentine Paradox today; how did one of the world's richest countries on the eve of the Great War become not just much poorer, but characterised by such disorder and mismanagement over the rest of the 20th century?

From the 1860s onwards, Argentina's booming export economy attracted vast foreign investment, as well as immigrants who might otherwise have joined the huddled masses in New York. Such was the pace of growth that some thought the country might become the United States of South America.

The good times weren't to last. The global downturn in the 1930s saw trade flows decline sharply, and with it capital and labour. Worse was to follow; a spiral of economic decline followed destructive protectionist policies driven by socialist leaders (Peronists) who, following multiple coups, centralised control, nationalised industries and sought to redistribute wealth.

Over time, easy populist economics eroded the country's institutions, with rent-seeking and corruption becoming the norm. No longer was Argentina holding its own with western Europe. All the usual signs of economic decline were present: soaring inflation, falling living standards, sliding productivity and ballooning debt.

Inflation, in particular, became totemic of the country's fall from grace. A military dictatorship, on top of the collapse of the manufacturing industry from the 1970s onwards, presided over hyperinflation equivalent to an annual rate of 5000% in 1976. Similar eye watering figures become far more common than they should do in the 1980s. Attempts to manage inflation via IMF assistance, failed price controls, cuts in spending and a new currency that lasted six years merely reduced the severity of the situation temporarily, doing little to tackle the underlying causes.

The Peronists have always had a popular base in the country, and their ability to adapt to the times is one of the reasons they have held Argentina under their grip for so long. By the election of Carlos Menem in 1989, things looked promising for a time. Though notionally a Peronist (trying to pin down the term is akin to a defender trying to mark peak-era Lionel Messi), Menem oversaw privatisation and nods towards market reforms.

But by the mid-1990s things were going badly wrong once more. Argentines call the years 1998 to 2002 'the great depression', and with good reason. In that period, the economy shrank by 28 per cent, the country defaulted on its foreign debt, Governments fell, unemployment hit 25%, poverty soared, and people rioted. Many voted with their feet by emigrating, if they hadn't done so already during the preceding years of hyperinflation.

Perhaps because of this, there was optimism in the early 2000s when the Presidency was held by Nestor Kirchner, though in hindsight this was largely Argentina riding the wave of the post-

millennium commodities boom. Ultimately, Kirchner, and later his wife Cristina, his successor as President, only offered a modern, reheated form of Peronism, complete with sky high inflation yet again, and a burgeoning black market for alternative currencies following the imposition of capital controls.

Decades came and went, but Argentina cycled through short lived mini booms, and longer, deeper, painful busts. Presidents, too, came and went, offering reforms and promising change, but economic malaise was never far away. Stubbornly-high inflation was the curse that kept returning, exceeding 100% in 2023, the year that an economics professor and TV pundit known as Javier Milei, well known in the country for his colourful on-air rants about the failings of successive governments, won the Presidency.

Milei was first elected to office as a national deputy (in the lower house of the Argentine Congress) just two years before he won the Presidency. Perhaps more impressively, that same year he set up La Libertad Avanza (Liberty Advances). Going from nowhere to the Head of State in such a short period of time is rare anywhere; for an outsider like Javier Milei to go from obscure pundit to President so quickly is surely testament to both the extraordinary conditions of the country, as well as his capacity for the theatrical, the unexpected and the radical.

Dubbed the “wild-haired celebrity economist” by *The Guardian*, Milei’s notoriety on Argentine TV made his name, but he won the Presidency because of the overwhelming public shift away from the main parties, with people seeking a radical change in direction from the failing consensus. As a candidate, Milei picked up early popularity from those aged under 30s, in part from a successful online viral campaign. Protest voters fed up with the usual Peronist offerings flocked to his cause, as he rose in the polls each time inflation went up. In the end he won comfortably, taking the highest percentage of the vote since Argentina’s transition to democracy, and significantly outperforming polls.

Milei’s offering, ignored at first, then mocked, was in essence libertarianism with a hint of populist flair. He describes himself as an “anarcho-capitalist”, a niche offset of the new Right which otherwise largely exists online. In the real world, he became politically engaged when he saw up front the human cost of hyperinflation in the 1980s. In response, inspired by the Austrian school of economics, Milei is implacably anti-state and a devotee of Margaret Thatcher’s monetary policies - as clean a break from Argentina’s ruling classes as it is possible to imagine. When studying economics, he read Keynes and hated it, describing his ideas as “bad influences that extend to this day, and which have caused profound damage to the economy [of Argentina] and its inhabitants.”

Stylistically, too, Milei is a break from previous leaders – seen, not just by his enemies, as rude and short tempered, his impatience may also stem from the recognition that the only other recent reform minded President, Mauricio Macri, did too little too slowly, and was voted out of office after one term. Looking more like a rock star from a forgotten era of sideburns and leather jackets, Milei looks nothing like anyone else elected President, and given the Argentine experience, that’s probably the point.

Running for the Presidency, he promised to bring down inflation once and for all and to slash Government spending. To emphasise the point, he often waved around a chainsaw at his rallies – emphasising what he planned to do to the state. The crowd loved it, and so far, Milei’s kept his word; regulations have been hacked away, the number of Government departments cut from 18 to 8, over 200 lower-level departments have been scrapped, and nearly 40,000 public sector jobs cut. New

tests have been implemented to assess the need to keep civil servants, alongside a hiring freeze amid claims that the Government aims to slash 75% of federal jobs.

This is in addition to cuts to red tape, with Milei missioning Federico Sturzenegger, an economist turned head of the Ministry of Deregulation and State Transformation, to cut farm export taxes, liberalise aviation routes, permit satellite internet connections, and end costly import-licensing schemes. Axing rent controls and cutting the myriad of housing regulations is already paying off with housing stock supply up by 20%, rental prices down 26%, and mortgage costs much lower too.

According to officials, the Government has made at least two deregulatory actions each day since Milei took office. It's no easy task; the Human Freedom Index ranked Argentina as the 146th most regulated country in the world when Milei took office. Sturzenegger claims these policies have made prices fall by nearly a third. There is also a website for the public, called 'Report the Bureaucracy', which takes recommendations about what else should be discarded.

In office for less than 18 months it is clearly impossible to gauge the true success of Javier Milei's record, though there are promising signs. In January 2025, Argentina announced a surplus for the first time in a decade. Deep cuts to public spending and slashing subsidies are behind the surprise budget surplus, of 1.76 trillion pesos, equal to 0.3% of gross domestic product (GDP) in the full year, according to Government statistics.

Though inflation rocketed after Milei's election, hitting 292% in April 2024, it has been falling since. With overseas investment picking up and consumer spending rising, Argentine GDP is forecast to grow 5% in 2025 according to the IMF. There is even talk of economic migrants starting to return home.

Milei inspires a devoted online fanbase, sitting at the apex of the anti-state, radical right and Bitcoin devotees. His followers around the world cite him as a rare libertarian given the chance to put into practice what many others can only theorise about, but on cultural matters he's more conventionally right wing. While Milei supports drug legalisation, he's been strongly opposed to abortion and euthanasia, is pro-Israel, and is opposed to the "cult of gender ideology". Equally, libertarians are generally not supposed to support increased transfer payments for the poorest in society, but whether Milei's philosophy is harder to pin down than many give credit to, or he's cognisant of the need to get re-elected in 2027, only time will tell.

Though British cheerleaders should, rightly, be concerned about his comments on Argentina's claims on the Falkland Islands (albeit this is a standard political position in Argentina), he appears to have at least accepted the Islands' status will not change anytime soon, telling the BBC he does not "seek conflict" on the matter.

There is also the alleged entanglement in a newly launched cryptocurrency which collapsed shortly after, with the Argentine Congress recently backing an inquiry into his role in a scheme which saw investors lose hundreds of millions of dollars. Given Milei's enemies vastly outnumber his supporters in Congress, it may turn out to be a battle he can do without.

There are questions, too, of declining public support. Detractors are bound to argue that the medicine is worse than the disease, but opinion polls do suggest Milei's popularity may be waning as bites to public services are fully realised. General strikes may become more common.

What lessons can we in Britain learn from the Argentine and Milei experience? Many persist with the illusion that Liz Truss' short lived premiership failed because it was too libertarian, though it seems unlikely a significant slice of the electorate will be converted to chainsaw economics anytime soon.

Moreover, on the evidence of recent years, British conservatives have little real appetite for shrinking the state nor making the genuinely difficult decisions in Government needed to make it happen.

Milei recently told *The Economist* that “my contempt for the state is infinite”, and his record to date backs that up. Is it credible that a Conservative politician might say (and mean) the same? It seems unlikely whilst cleaving to the winter fuel payments and an array of other outdated universal benefits which cannot be afforded indefinitely.

In Britain, where public spending accounts for 45% of our GDP, and is set to hit £1.27 trillion in 2025-26, up a fifth from before the pandemic, slow growth, slumping productivity and chronic debt are the new normal. High inflation may have terminally wounded incumbents across the west, but we have to go back to the mid-1970s for sky high inflation, which is still timid by Argentine standards. Maybe our own economic outlook would have to get much worse before a laser-like focus on shrinking the state became palatable precisely because it was necessary.

The business of cutting Government spending isn't about chainsaw memes and the pretence that removing endless waste can dig us out of holes successive administrations have dug; cutting spending means making very difficult trades offs, and spending less on services people have come to rely on. Moreover, America's recent chaotic experiment with overnight sharp shocks to spending, the memecoin turned Department of Government Waste (DOGE), may dampen enthusiasm for such radical changes in direction, even if raw maths suggest they are needed.

The UK is not about to dance with anarcho-capitalism, but there is a growing sense that the *status quo* on economic policy is broken, and that tinkering with tax bands, planning reform and national insurance contributions simply won't cut it. Through that lens the radicalism of Milei, and the determination to arrest decline even if it means sacrifices resulting from a short-term shock, is worth examining more closely.

## Nayib Bukele of El Salvador

By William Hayes

Our age is one in which ideology-led political parties are treated with suspicion and fear by the liberal establishments of western nations, still misplacing their faith in triangulation and the assumptions of the last century as mechanisms by which to navigate the challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. So there should be little shock or bemusement when radical solutions posed by politicians with strong ideological convictions are not only greeted with the same suspicion but are often completely disregarded, at best facing ridicule and at worst demonisation.

In fact, this distaste for political zeal is particularly strong in Britain, the only major western nation to fail to properly foster or embrace an authentically conservative option as the main right-wing force within the country. No MAGA-style revolution has happened within the Conservative Party, leaving it to nosedive its way towards electoral obliteration clinging to the ever-hallowed 'sensible' political centre for comfort as it does; and despite its messaging, Reform UK seems to offer neither the competent political operation nor the ideological purity of its European populist counterparts – think of the National Rally or the AfD.

The closest reflection (on the British right) of the direction of travel seen in the rest of the western world in the last 10 years was the realignment of 2019, when the Conservative Party increased its majority in a general election called to break the Brexit deadlock. Reinvigorated under the new leadership of Boris Johnson (elected in June of the same year) and seemingly willing to remove the hindrance caused by the party's Europhilic wing, withdrawing the whip from 21 rebel MPs (of whom only 10 had the whip restored), the party stood on a manifesto promising to finally leave the European Union, lower immigration and 'level up' 'left-behind' areas. This caused a notable shift in the demographic of those who voted Conservative, with the majority of Tory gains coming from predominantly working-class constituencies in the midlands and north of England, causing political 'realignment' and opening up the Conservative Party to more voters by presenting a more constitutionally and socially conservative offer. However, with the final Brexit settlement being less than ideal to many and immigration, both legal and illegal, ballooning to unprecedented levels, the realignment was irrefutably squandered. This left the mainstream British right split at the 2024 general election, potentially dooming the nation to decades of Labour government and fundamentally in a weaker position than its European and North American counterparts. All this in a time when the global picture is ever more bleak and Britain's position within it ever more vulnerable.

So it is important to remember that we can look beyond Europe and North America to draw examples of successes on the right, where parties and individuals with the required ideological zeal and clarity have created those improvements and fostered positive change within their country. With that, one casts one's gaze to El Salvador and the rise of Nayib Bukele.

Bukele's 'rise' isn't as dramatic as the circumstance, style and effect his ongoing presidency would suggest. He emerged in the world of representative politics when elected Mayor of Nuevo Cuscatlán in 2012, a small coffee town (with a population of around 7000) on the outskirts of the capital San Salvador. Although winning by a small majority of only 169 votes, he quickly garnered an exceedingly positive reputation within the town. Even though in this early period of his political career he stood as a candidate for the FMLN, a left wing party formed from a historically Marxist guerrilla rebel

group, Bukele's focus didn't so much revolve around touting party politics and conforming to party line, as it did to public service and improving the lives of those he represented, committing to battling crime and investing in community development from the start. Whilst there are many things attributed to Bukele during his relatively brief tenure as Mayor of Nuevo Cuscatlán (May 2012 – April 2015), the one statistic that he has often repeated and promoted in subsequent campaigns is that during his time in the role there was only one reported homicide in the town. This record and reputation put Bukele in good stead to stand for Mayor of San Salvador – winning that election in 2015. As Mayor of San Salvador, Bukele continued in a similar fashion to his time in Nuevo Cuscatlán, focusing on crime and sound public investment – cementing his reputation and making his popularity national.

The onset of Bukele's political career came during a period where the landscape in El Salvador painted a pretty bleak picture. As reflected across much of South and Central America, El Salvador has deep rooted issues with organised crime and gang violence, being a prolific and worsening problem since the end of the Salvadoran Civil War in 1992. A consequence of refugees of the war who had fled to the United States, settled in Los Angeles and formed/joined street gangs (most notably MS-13 and the 18<sup>th</sup> Street gang) being deported back to El Salvador over the course of the 1990s, and then resuming their criminal activities back in their home country, was the development of an extremely high murder rate. In 2012 a truce was called between the Government of the time, the Catholic Church and the two aforementioned gangs (the two largest in the country – in 2012 it was estimated that there were over 60,000 active gang members in El Salvador), in an attempt to lower the nation's homicide rate – which had risen to 4,308 by 2011. By 2014 this truce has dissolved and by 2015 the country was seeing an average murder rate of 18 a day, making it the nation with the world's worst homicide rate, or in other terms the global murder capital.

It was during this period that Bukele's relationship with his party the FMLN broke down, regularly clashing with fellow party representatives and fiercely criticising party leader Salvador Sánchez Cerén, going against the party line frequently. The straw that broke the camel's back came when Bukele allegedly threw a projectile at and seriously insulted fellow FMLN member Xóchitl Marchelli, leading to Bukele's expulsion from the party in October 2017. In the following year's legislative and municipal election, in which prior to his expulsion Bukele was forecast and expected to retain his seat, he publicly urged his supporters to stay at home or spoil their ballot. In that election the FMLN performed the poorest it had in any election since 1994.

In the years subsequent to the Civil War, El Salvador was fundamentally a two-party system, with power being passed between the FMLN and ARENA, Bukele, still a popular politician and very much touted as a future presidential candidate, yet rendered politically homeless, needed to find a party to represent for the upcoming 2019 election. Bukele joined GANA, a smaller party formed in 2010 who as of 2019 had never returned a president; these fortunes would change as Bukele won that year's election with a majority of 53.1%. Bukele's presidential campaign set him apart from the other candidates. The two candidates from the established parties ran very traditional campaigns, holding conventional rallies and making television and radio appearances, evangelising arguments and policies orthodox within the context of Salvadoran politics. Bukele on the other hand did not. His rallies were folksy and personal, and he communicated much of his message via social media. He even refused to participate in the candidate debates as he didn't believe he needed to engage with the mainstream mechanisms of the political establishment in order to succeed. Furthermore, Bukele campaigned on a platform of uprooting and overhauling the political system altogether, promising to crush crime and root out corruption.



Once he assumed office, change was implemented immediately. Bukele's *Territorial Control Plan* would introduce strict measures and reforms in an attempt to crack down on the gang problem. These included heavily policing, with aid of the military, of areas of the country that had effectively become gang run territory, reequipping the police and army with new equipment, and calling a state of emergency in the nations prisons, preventing calls and visitors to restrict gang communication.

All this started to take effect and slowly improved the situation in the country, until in March 2022, for reasons that are not conclusively known, 87 randomly targeted people were murdered within a single weekend. Bukele called a 30 day 'state of exception', in which constitutional rights were suspended in response. This enabled police to arrest people without telling them why, increase the time in which people could be held by the police without charge from 3 days to 15 days and allowed the Government, without warrant, to monitor citizens communications. Within a week of the state of exception being enacted, 6,000 people had been arrested; the policy ushered in mass detention and the police faced little consequence for false arrest - in fact as little as having a tattoo that resembled one associated with a certain gang could see you detained. Since its introduction the state of exception has been renewed 31 times (as of October 2024) and within one year it saw over 70,000 people detained, with suspected criminals cramped into overcrowded prisons up to 4 times beyond capacity. Even though the extremity of these measures is alarming to many, they do seem to have worked. After only a month of mass incarceration homicide rates dropped from 4.8 homicides a day to 1.3. A month later this decreased to 0.5 homicides a day, and this trend has persisted ever since, transforming El Salvador from one of the most dangerous countries in the world to one of the safest.

Bukele's results are apparent – order and civility have now been restored to El Salvador. However, it the way in which this has been achieved is far from orthodox and is open for serious criticism. This mass, borderline arbitrary, detention has led to scores of false arrests on extremely slim grounds, with little to no accountability taken or compensation offered, partly due to a backlogged judiciary, with many stuck in the system. Furthermore, the overcrowding of prisons has led to poor conditions with 1.7% of the nation's population incarcerated. With a prison population estimated at 108,000, it is running at 38,000 overcapacity. The photographs this has produced have now reached a certain level of infamy, depicting rows of men tightly packed together on the ground with their hands cable-tied behind their backs.

How Bukele politically manoeuvred to get to this position can't go ignored, particularly how he pushed through the Territorial Control Plan. Phase 3 of the plan, which aimed to reequip the military and police with 109 million dollars of modern equipment to combat the gangs, was caveated by requiring the nation's Legislative Assembly to approve the loan needed to deliver this. Despite winning the presidential election in 2019 with his previously minor, adoptive party GANA, the Legislative Assembly was still dominated by the two major parties. These pushed back, demanding more transparency regarding how these funds would be spent. Bukele, turning to the constitution, demanded an extraordinary session of the Legislative Council to meet in February 2020. However, when the council convened, not enough members turned up to approve the loan, Bukele himself attending with an armed escort of 40 soldiers as his supporters surrounded the building.

This was described as an 'attempted coup' by the President of the Legislative Assembly. Whether this was entirely spectacle or a genuine display of intent to use force, it was objectively an indicator that Bukele is willing to subvert established democratic processes in order to achieve what he believes to be in the interest of the people.

Since then, Bukele has faced little to no pushback from within the political system in El Salvador, with *Nuevas Ideas*, a party he formed, taking 56 of the 84 seats in the 2021 Salvadoran Legislative

Elections. After this, Bukele cleared out the dissenting members of Supreme Court and replaced them with his allies – giving him majority control of all aspects of government.

Much of this has led to Bukele being largely discredited by the world's media, pan-national bodies like the United Nations, and international organisations like Human Rights Watch for infringing upon liberties and challenging democratic ideals. Despite this, Bukele's decisive if not controversial action in tackling what could only be described as an existential threat to Salvadoran public order has garnered a very positive reaction within the country itself, regardless of external criticism – with his approval rating being at 91% as of November 2024.

Furthermore, in many ways Bukele is very reflective of other leaders on the right. His disdain for the media, desire to clear the public sector of liberal influence and alternative campaigning methods are echoed by right wing parties across Europe and in some ways map very directly onto the actions and practices of Trump in the USA. I believe that this acts as a very interesting case study as to what is prioritised in desperate times. Despite Bukele manipulating and infringing upon constitutional and legal precedents and challenging some of the fundamental assumptions of western democracy, he does appear to have quelled the nation's crippling crime problem, procuring and maintaining an extremely high level of popularity in doing so regardless of method. A very clear comparison can be drawn here to Donald Trump. Despite the disturbing occurrences of the 6<sup>th</sup> January 2021, something for which Trump was held partially responsible for by many, the majority excused him for this in electing him in the 2024 presidential election, signalling a decision in the public consciousness that despite this apparent attempted infringement on democracy a Trump administration was necessary to remedy the grave ills and failings of the Democrats and the liberal elite. This similarity is especially interesting as at the time of writing this (March 2025) Bukele has volunteered to receive criminal deportees from the USA into the Salvadoran justice system, showing the Trump administration's willingness to work with such a regime.

With all this taken into account, it is apparent that there are several things - when approached with measured caution - that the British right, specifically the Conservative Party can take from Bukele's time in office. This is most apparent when you compare our national situation to that of El Salvador in 2019 - two nations facing existential crisis.

Whereas theirs was gang violence, ours is immigration. Over the course of the last 25 years migration in Britain has skyrocketed, with a disproportionate percentage of that increase taking place since 2020. In 2023 alone 1.2 million people entered the United Kingdom – this is an unsustainable level. It is something that negatively affects society in a multitude of ways, putting pressure and strain on education, healthcare, the judiciary and housing whilst simultaneously diluting and weakening our culture and creating a less cohesive society – making it a dilemma of an existential nature.

Sadly, much of this has been allowed to transpire under consecutive Conservative governments. If the establishment, especially the centre-right ignores reality and fails to address such problems robustly then very real and dire consequences loom. This is what happened in El Salvador for decades and it took the extreme measures of a political outsider to remedy this and return the nation from a state of dysfunction and restore order. The United Kingdom is not yet in quite as an apocalyptic position, but we are staring it down the barrel.

It is now the responsibility of the Conservative Party in opposition as the major centre right force within the country to address this to its full rhetorical extent, without dressing it up in effete language or softening how the message is being conveyed in fear of appearing 'vulgar'. Once a robust policy platform to deal with this issue is devised - the only way of winning back the Reform vote and

in turn the only way of winning a general election - the task at hand must be followed through to its conclusion in order to halt this crisis before we reach breaking point.

If two things are to be taken from Bukele's presidency, they are this; the hope-inspiring example that decisive action to resolve a serious issue can work against the odds, and the cautionary tale that if a threat becomes too extreme there is a danger that equally extreme solutions follow.

## Pierre Poilievre of Canada

By Jake Thrupp

In an era of political fatigue and fragmented voter loyalties, one figure has risen through the noise with a message that is both simple and strikingly effective: Pierre Poilievre, the leader of Canada's Conservative Party.

Poilievre's ascension has been anything but accidental. While many opposition leaders struggle to connect with the public or define their parties beyond opposition for opposition's sake, Poilievre has carved out a persona rooted in economic pragmatism, cultural confidence, and combative competence.

His rise is not only significant in the Canadian context but offers compelling lessons for the Conservative Party here in the UK, which still finds itself bruised and directionless.

What sets Poilievre apart is his brand of conservatism: populist in tone, yet polished in delivery. He has tapped into widespread discontent over the cost of living, housing affordability, and the bloated public sector, without veering into the rhetoric of his American counterparts.

He is articulate, tightly disciplined, and policy-focused — a man who can deliver a soundbite but also hold his own in a detailed debate.

That duality has made him a formidable presence in the Parliament. His parliamentary performances are not just sound and fury, but a steady stream of punchy yet well-researched criticisms of the former Trudeau government. Whether attacking the Liberals' inflationary spending, exposing ethics scandals, or mocking what he calls "woke nonsense", Poilievre has consistently managed to appear both principled and relatable.

In a political landscape increasingly shaped by performance, optics, and cultural signalling, this matters. Poilievre doesn't just oppose for the sake of it — he explains why, and offers an alternative. For many Canadians, that has been a breath of fresh air after years of what they perceive as sanctimonious progressivism by former prime minister Justin Trudeau.

Poilievre's messaging has been consistent. He speaks the language of the middle class, of the working family trying to make ends meet in the face of rising rents, inflated grocery prices, and mounting debt.

He has successfully framed himself as the champion of "common sense", railing against the bureaucracy, red tape, and elite detachment that define so much of modern governance. His slogan, "Bring it home", is both literal and symbolic: a call to restore affordability, security, and control to hard-working Canadians.

Housing, in particular, has been central to Poilievre's pitch. He has promised to cut through planning delays, incentivise construction, and hold local authorities accountable for supply shortages — all in stark contrast to the Liberal government, which has been accused of fiddling while Canada's housing crisis burns.

And crucially, Poilievre has wrapped his economic agenda in cultural clarity. He speaks plainly. He avoids jargon. He doesn't shy away from calling out identity politics when he sees it as a distraction

from bread and butter issues. This blend of economic urgency and cultural forthrightness has proven politically potent.

For the UK Conservative Party there are clear and painful parallels. After 14 years in power, the Tories exhausted the goodwill that came with Boris Johnson's 2019 majority and the mandate of delivering Brexit to unleash the potential of Britain.

As we have been reminded recently, the UK economy has virtually flatlined with public services strained. Voters see a Government that is not delivering or improving their standard of living — much like how many Canadians view the Liberals.

The first lesson from Canada's Poilievre is to have a credible opposition starts with credible communication.

The second is to master a simple economic narrative. Poilievre's appeal is rooted in a story where he articulates to voters that the Liberals are making your life harder, and he will make it easier.

British Tories, by contrast, have too often leaned on abstract concepts like "levelling up" without ever fully explaining how those ideas will put more money in people's pockets or bring rents down.

The third lesson is party discipline. Poilievre has avoided the infighting that had often plagued his own party in the past. He has cultivated a team that stays on message, does not leak, and knows what it stands for. Compare that to the Conservative Party's recent years of psychodrama.

And finally, the Canadian Conservative leader has been unafraid to challenge progressive orthodoxy without descending into caricature. He criticises "wokeism" not as a ranting culture warrior, but as someone pointing out misplaced priorities.

Whether it's defending free speech, opposing radical gender ideology in schools, or questioning diversity targets that appear to trump merit, he offers a confident, unapologetic conservatism that doesn't alienate the mainstream.

In the UK, too many Tories have either leaned into performative outrage or cowered in fear of media backlash. What Poilievre shows is that there is space for a mature, culturally grounded conservatism that can resonate without repelling.

For much of the past year, polls have shown Poilievre's Conservatives well ahead of the Liberals. His ability to connect with Canadians across generations and geographies has made a change in government seem not just likely but inevitable.

But politics is rarely linear.

Enter Mark Carney.

The former Bank of Canada and Bank of England governor has been installed as Prime Minister, and has called a snap election for 28 April after just 10 days in the role. He will be seeking both a seat in the House of Commons and his own mandate to govern.

Carney, who has touted his centrist credentials and economic acumen, is already polling competitively. He represents the kind of sober, establishment alternative that some voters — particularly in urban and suburban areas — may find reassuring after the rhetorical sharpness of Poilievre.

Ironically, Carney's resurgence may owe something to the same populist winds Poilievre has harnessed.

In recent months, US President Donald Trump has made inflammatory comments suggesting Canada is on the path to becoming "America's 51st state" — a not-so-subtle swipe at Canada's political independence. For some Canadians, especially those wary of Poilievre's economic nationalism and conservative tone, that sort of rhetoric is a reminder of what they want to avoid.

Pierre Poilievre's story is both an inspiration and a warning. He has shown how a conservative movement can regroup, refocus, and rise again — not by reinventing itself, but by remembering what matters to mainstream voters. By speaking plainly, attacking economic stagnation, and defending common sense values, he has turned the Conservatives into a party with momentum and a message.

But as the emergence of Carney reminds us, even the most commanding lead can evaporate in the modern day political environment.

For British Conservatives, the lesson is clear. Renewal is possible, but it requires more than just waiting for Labour to mess up. It demands discipline, clarity, and a message that speaks to both the head and the heart.

Poilievre offers a case study in how to turn opposition into opportunity.

## The Authors

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