



More in  
Common

# Conservative Leadership Election Focus Groups

The voters meet the candidates

September 2024

# Conservative Leadership Election Focus Groups

As Conservative MPs begin to vote in the first round of the Conservative leadership election, More in Common is releasing analysis from extensive focus group research carried out in July and August 2024.

The focus groups explored two main areas:

- First, why did these voters turn away from the Conservatives having all voted for the party in 2019 and why did they think the Conservatives lost right across the country?
- Second, these voters' first impressions and reactions to the six candidates vying for the votes of both MPs and Conservative Party members

Given the low name-recognition of the candidates, polling public attitudes to them has limitations. Instead focus groups are a good tool to introduce the public to the candidates and understand what people's initial reactions are 'as they meet them for the first time/ received by the public'. Remembering that political attention is low - how the potential candidates present to the public 'at first glance' is likely to have an outsized role in determining whether they will be successful.

The research identifies both the immense scale of the challenge facing the next Conservative leader in regaining the trust and confidence of the public, as well as setting out the strengths and challenges of the appeal of each of the candidates.

As MPs and Conservative members vote on the potential leadership candidates in the coming weeks, this analysis illustrates the strengths of each candidates' electoral appeal as well as the appeal challenges they'll face should they be successfully elected as leader of Conservative Party and leader of the Opposition.

# Recruitment criteria and methodology

## Recruitment criteria

The ten focus groups were convened across English constituencies in July and August 2024:

- **Surrey Heath** - 2019 Conservative voters who voted Liberal Democrat in 2024 (22nd July 2024)
- **Basildon South & East Thurrock** - 2019 Conservative who switched to Reform in 2024 (5th August 2024)
- **Welwyn Hatfield** - 2019 Conservative who voted Labour in 2024 (7th August 2024)
- **Shropshire North** - 2019 Conservative voters who voted Liberal Democrat in 2024 (8th August 2024)
- **Rother Valley** - 2019 Conservative voters who switched to Labour in 2024 (12th August 2024)
- **Stockton West** - 2019 Conservative who also voted Conservative in 2024 (14th August 2024)
- **Swindon North** - 2019 Conservative voters who switched to Labour in 2024 (21st August 2024)
- **Henley** - 2019 Conservative voters who voted either Liberal Democrat or Reform in 2024 (28th August 2024)
- **Great Yarmouth** - 2019 Conservative voters who switched to Reform in 2024 (28th August 2024)
- **Conservative members groups** - 2019 Conservative voters who voted Conservative in 2024 (From across various constituencies) (29th August 2024)

Participants came from a mix of demographic background including by age, gender, socio-economic background and ethnicity. All focus groups were recruited using a network of independent local recruiters.

## Research Methodology

Each focus group discussion began with asking the participants why the Conservatives had lost and what they needed to do to win back their trust at the next election. The discussion then turned to the candidates for the Conservative leadership. Participants were first shown a photo of each candidate to see if they knew who they were and if they had any initial views on the candidates. Given name recognition was low, participants were then shown a series of clips of the candidates. These clips were a mix of campaign videos, interviews and debates - where there were campaign-issued materials available those were used, alongside alternative sources such as interviews or debates. Participants were asked - regardless of what they knew about the candidates already - to give their gut reactions, what they liked and disliked about what they saw, and whether any candidates felt Prime Ministerial.

## **Section 1**

Why did the Conservatives  
lose and the challenge facing  
their next leader

# Voters' verdict: Why did the Conservatives lose?

Before testing specific views on any of the candidates, our focus groups explored why these mostly former Conservative voters thought the Conservatives lost the election.

Almost without fail every participant, even those who had stuck with the Conservatives, felt that **the party deserved to lose the election**. Many said that they simply had had too many chances and that too many things had gone wrong. Others felt that it was inevitable that the Conservatives would lose given it was natural to opt for a change after 14 years.

In those conversations about what drove the Conservative defeat, the issues that the new leader of the Conservatives would have to address to regain the confidence of voters also became clear. There was a shared view on the failings of the Party over the last Parliament and Labour, Liberal Democrat and Reform Switchers set three challenges - **a trust challenge, a relatability challenge and a chaos challenge** - in order to consider returning to the Conservative fold. The public want a Conservative party that delivers on its promises, that is in touch with ordinary people, and can put the chaos and disunity of recent years behind it.

Address these challenges and voters who abandoned the Party between 2019 and 2024 may be willing to give the new Conservative leader a hearing. However, in many of our conversations, **many switchers said they were not inclined to back to the Conservatives any time soon**. The next Conservative leader has their work cut out for them to turn their party's electoral fortunes around - and to do so in a single parliamentary cycle.

# The trust challenge

The key reason why many former Conservative voters say they abandoned the party was simply because they no longer trusted it.

Part of this breakdown in trust was due to scandals - Partygate came up time and time again with different groups of voters, as did Betting-gate. But overall what corroded these voters' trust the most was the idea that it was 'one rule for them' and another one for the public and the last Conservative Government had become the embodiment of that.

But beyond these scandals, the failure to deliver or make good on promises on policy also reinforced the Conservative's trust challenge. People felt that the post-Brexit contract Boris Johnson had made with voters - on immigration, the NHS and levelling up - had not been delivered and this more than anything reinforced the need for change.

The next leader will have their work cut out for them to demonstrate that they can be trusted - in particular that will likely involve the new leader being able to communicate honesty and authenticity - in this regard, if not in many others, the Conservatives would do well to learn from the success of Nigel Farage, who many voters consistently told us - even if they would never consider voting Reform - 'said it like it was'.

**So I think it's lack of trust. I think they lost an awful lot of goodwill due to obviously the Partygate situation, but I think the bottom line is lack of trust from a lot of people**

*Tracy, school admin, Stockton*

**I don't think it's possible for them to win back the trust in four or five years. I think it'll take longer than that because they've just cheated and upset too many people and people won't forget'**

*Ray, Cleaner, Great Yarmouth*

**They've got to clear out all the old deadwood. Let's have some good people of good standing, not looking after their mates**

*Jeanette, theatre worker, Surrey Heath*

**No one's really dealt with mass immigration. And what that's doing is it's creating a massive social issue. We're not looking at the root causes**

*James, AV Manager, Welwyn*

# The relatability challenge

In conversation after conversation with voters, most felt that the Conservatives were out of touch and simply 'didn't get it' as people were struggling during the cost of living crisis.

For many, Rishi Sunak and his wealth personally embodied being out of touch, and this was reinforced by Sunak's interactions with voters - whether the D-Day debacle or appearing not to know how to use contactless. While the next leader won't face this same challenge, not being Rishi Sunak is unlikely to be enough to show the public that the new leader and their party understands the challenges faced by families up and down the country - there is a danger in being perceived as a 'typical Tory'.

However, voters' relatability is not only about personnel and their individual backgrounds - it's also about whether the party has a policy offer which shows the public that it understands and values their priorities and is focused on delivering on them. If during the leadership race the conversation focuses too much on those areas which excite the base, or the highly politically engaged, there is a danger the challenge of relatability is reinforced.

Much like the debate in the US at the moment, there is a danger that the Conservatives have started to become seen as 'weird'. Certainly in seats won by the Liberal Democrats, voters would explain that they were voting Lib Dem in these traditionally Tory strongholds because Ed Davey's Party just seemed more 'normal'.

**I think they need to get away from this recipe of people, public school, boys and girls going to Oxbridge and getting a classics degree and then going into politics and all looking after them for themselves, looking out for themselves**

*James, Software Developer, Stockton*

**I think they need to get back in touch with the real world and the people out there that have to work for a living**

*Peter, Hospitality Business Owner, Welwyn*

**I know obviously most politicians are always going to be not like us average Joe, do you know what I mean? But I feel like Rishi, just the whole thing about how much money he had... We are the ones working hard but have no money at the end of the month... I just think people have had enough of that type of elitism**

*Emily, Practice Manager, Welwyn*

# The chaos challenge

The perceived chaos of the Conservatives in government in recent years is the third reason voters told us they lost confidence in the party. In almost every focus group, people talked about the continual changes of leader, the rows within the Party, as well as events such as the mini-budget.

Voters who abandoned the party for Labour, the Liberal Democrats and Reform all concurred that the Tories were divided and that there had been too much drama and infighting over the last few years that distracted from people's everyday struggles. The next Conservative leader will have to demonstrate they are most interested in 'getting on with the job', not internal politicking.

It's for that reason that voters were more open to some new and fresh candidates over some of the more experienced candidates. Some also thought that a clearout of 'deadwood' was needed to keep the Tories focused on regaining the trust of the public rather than internal infighting.

Some of the candidates who performed poorly in our testing did so because people felt they would be divisive and continue the cycle of chaos - and so one of the key challenges facing the party's new leader will be presenting a united front, and avoiding the perception of being focused on itself rather than the country.

**Liz, Boris, Rishi, that constant turnaround of people we didn't vote in originally. Mistake after mistake and it completely destroyed the trust'**

*Steve, IT worker, Swindon*

**I think for me there was too many scandals, too much unrest. I think they put themselves in a position where they'd lost touch with the rest of the country**

*Ricky, Water worker, Swindon*

**It was the integrity piece. It just became a laughing stock in my eyes and a joke**

*Sue, stay at home mum, Surrey Heath*



## **Section 2**

Voters' first impressions of the candidates

# Voters' first impressions of the candidates

All of the candidates have low name recognition with the public. This low name recognition makes quantitative research or polling less useful at understanding which candidates might have more or less appeal - people simply don't know them. Instead focus groups allow us the opportunity to present the candidates through their interviews, videos and debates and to gauge initial reactions. **Focus groups can delve more into the 'why' and not only the 'what' of public opinion which can be useful lens to use when name recognition of individuals is low.**

Even with 2024 Conservative voters, only two candidates (Priti Patel and James Cleverly) have more than half of this group of voters saying they are very or somewhat familiar with them.

Most of the analysis in this section then comes from voters' first reactions to seeing clips of speeches, campaign ads or debates where candidates have taken part - for much of the public who don't pay a significant amount of attention to politics these 'first reactions' will shape how they see any new leader - but of course these impressions can and do change as voters get to see someone in role .

**Across the focus groups, no candidate emerged as having the full package - though there were clear patterns that held across different groups of voters that are likely to shape how the candidates are received by the public.** This section outlines the overall verdict of voters from across the groups as well as showing where candidates appealed strongly to different groups of voters and where the candidates are likely to face challenges in their electoral appeal with these former Conservative voters.

# Kemi Badenoch: the voters' verdict



## Voters' overall assessment

Most thought Badenoch offered something new, liked her straight-talking and focus on honesty and thought she was relatable. The themes which summed up voters reaction to her were 'intriguing' and 'refreshing' - more than any other candidate the voters we spoke to wanted to know more about her. She performed best with Liberal Democrat and Reform Switchers. Some though had concerns that she was too naive or inexperienced to be Prime Minister.

*Quite straight talking as well in the sense that she kind of knew what she wanted and where she wanted to go and the changes she wanted to make to the party - Ricky, Wessex Water worker, Swindon*

*I would like Kemi to get in, but I think it's just the gravitas and the experience I'm a little bit concerned about there - Susan, project manager, Surrey Heath*

# Kemi Badenoch's appeal: the strengths

For voters tired with the Conservative party and its offer, a core strength of Badenoch's appeal across the groups was that she offered something new and different and refreshing - which many thought was badly needed. For this reason alone, many felt that they'd be willing to give her a hearing and crucially wanted to know more about her. That desire to know more about her means how she introduces herself to the public in the next few weeks will really matter.

Badenoch also passed the honesty test, people felt that she wouldn't sugar coat issues, she was direct and she wouldn't beat around the bush - in short, she could level with voters.

Voters also liked her more modest background and thought she presented herself as being down to earth - making it easier for her to pass their relatability test.

A recurring theme was that she 'came across well', was well-spoken, confident and sounded as though she believed what she was saying.

**She could bring some new fresh, young blood, slightly different to your typical public school boy Conservative leader**  
*Haley, charity worker, Surrey Heath*

**She seemed a lot more genuine, more down to earth. She appeared to be quite honest. She seemed more human**  
*Tracy, School Admin Officer, Stockton*

**Very good I thought. She was very relatable, very positive, knew exactly what she wanted to do**  
*Tony, Driver, Great Yarmouth*

# Kemi Badenoch's appeal: the challenges

The core challenge facing Badenoch's appeal with voters is a perceived lack of experience or a political naivety.

Should she be elected as LOTO, she would need to show not only that she has the ideas and passion for the job, but has a credible plan and a good team in place who can implement her policies and turn her ideas into reality.

A few were also concerned about a perceived lack of warmth in Badenoch's videos and interviews. While many liked her pitch on honesty, their broader cynicism of politicians meant they questioned whether she would actually practice what she preached on truthfulness - though this will be hard for any leader to correct..

**She comes across as very politically naive. I think she talks the talk, but at the end of the day I don't think she's had the grounding**

*Peter, Hospitality Business Owner, Welwyn*

**I do quite like a charismatic leader. She didn't seem to have that. For me, if I was watching that I wouldn't be wowed and feel really fired up that I would sort of feel comfortable or confident that she would be the next Conservative leader**

*Hannah, company secretary, Henley*

**I just found a bit monotone for me, so although I could relate to what she said and I thought what she said was pretty much right, I just found to me she's just reading off a script**

*Ray, Cleaner, Great Yarmouth*

# James Cleverly: the voters' verdict



## Voters' overall assessment

Cleverly performed the best and the most consistently of all the candidates. He won out particularly on relatability. The groups liked the fact he was friendly, plain speaking, and approachable and seemed to have a laid-back character. Crucially people felt that he 'got it' and that was a contrast particularly with Rishi Sunak. However, for some, there were questions about whether he was serious about running the country as PM.

*'He seems, well-spoken, not flustered, very calm. I just seem calm and cool and collected sort of type of character' - Oliver, Software Engineer, Stockton*

*'I mean he is one that actually could relate more to the normal people' - Dawn, Security Officer, Great Yarmouth*

# James Cleverly's appeal: the strengths

Cleverly's campaign launch video rooted in his background growing up in Lewisham impressed across the board - people liked that he clearly didn't come from a traditional Tory background, but also talked about how his upbringing informed his politics.

Participants across groups found him friendly, plain speaking and approachable and liked that he seemed to be fairly laid-back and not arrogant unlike many Tory politicians as they saw it.

Crucially people felt that he 'got it' and was someone who understood every day concerns - certainly in contrast with Sunak who they largely found to be out-of-touch.

His military background also went down well across groups and some said they could see him bringing the party back together - being a unifying rather than a divisive figure.

**I actually liked him. He were relaxed. I think it's a far better way to be. It seemed more honest**

*Glenda, Admin Officer, Rother Valley*

**I think he's got a much better understanding what's going on in the rest of the country, he's got a military background. I think he's a lot more appealing to a vast swathe of people**

*Peter, Hospitality Business Owner, Welwyn*

**I mean he is one that actually could relate more to the normal people**

*Dawn, Security Officer, Great Yarmouth*

# James Cleverly's appeal: the challenges

While voters were broadly positive about Cleverly's appeal, the only consistent and repeated concern was that he was perhaps too laid back or jovial.

This was reinforced for the few participants who had heard his off-colour jokes or saw him in the TV spin rooms during the election campaign and disapproved and thought it made him look less like a serious leader.

Should he be elected as LOTO, he would have to convince the public that he was more than just a relatable person and good bloke, but was serious about running the country and had the skill, strength and the ideas to do it.

**I still didn't see a leader no matter how well he spoke seems like a great guy. I think there's a difference between being a great bloke that can speak well and a leader**

*Andy, British Airways, Henley*

**When he was Home Secretary he was speaking about the date rape drug being something he regularly slipped to his wife and how it made her compliant and then he got really angry at the press for reporting it. Public office is about honour and decency and what you think in private is what you say in public and you shouldn't have two versions of the same person.**

*Peter, NHS worker, Surrey Heath*

**For me he lost a bit of guts in him as he went on. Has he really got enough guts to run the country? You do need a bit of an edge and he didn't seem to have it**

*Elaine, Retired Business owner, Great Yarmouth*



# Robert Jenrick: the voters' verdict



## Voters' overall assessment

Robert Jenrick had the biggest contrast of any candidate we tested. Voters thought he was saying the right things - more so than any other candidate, but his personal image didn't appeal and people thought he was the wrong messenger to be saying them. People consistently thought he was too old school Conservative, lacked empathy and seemed 'smug' 'slimey' or 'wooden' - and that he would struggle to bring people with him and unite them around him as leader.

*I feel like if I close my eyes, he was saying all the right things. He sounded positive, but when I opened my eyes and looked at his face, he looks kind of smug and smarmy - Kate, Customer Service Assistant, Great Yarmouth*

*My initial thought is he should probably be in the Reform party. It seemed quite similar to that. And as much as I agree with a lot of his policies there, I think he would struggle to unite the Conservatives' - John, operations director, Henley*

# Robert Jenrick's appeal: the strengths

The main strength of Jenrick's appeal - particularly with Reform switchers - was that he was saying the right things and they agreed with him on his ideas, despite having concerns about whether or not he was the right messenger.

While his perceived 'old school Conservative' pitch put some off, with Reform switchers and loyal Conservatives, some liked that pitch and thought he had identified important issues, where the party had gone wrong - particularly on issues like immigration.

Some voters also liked what they saw as strength from Jenrick - however, others saw him as more aggressive than strong.

**I quite like the policies of Robert Jenrick, but he didn't come across as a likeable person who's going to unite any party**

*John, operations director, Henley*

**I liked him. He's clean cut. He's saying that there needs to be a change.. Old school Conservative values. It felt like you could rely on him to deliver those things. It was the language he was using I thought was good**

*Oliver, Software Engineer, Stockton*

**I thought he come across a bit better than I expected ...I thought he was quite down to earth**

*Ian, Fire Protection Stockton*

# Robert Jenrick's appeal: the challenges

Jenrick's personal appeal with voters held him back even though what he said was popular. Consistently it felt as though he risked having a Michael Howard or JD Vance style problem - and just wasn't likeable enough. Voters felt he was too old school Conservative, appeared as smug, slimey or smarmy and could be wooden in his answers.

If Jenrick became LOTO, he'd have to work on building a more clubbable personal image and soften the sharp edges - he would also want to consider how to make other members of his team the face of the party, while he led on the ideas and vision.

Those who abandoned the Conservatives to the left felt that he would be unable to unify the party successfully and one even wondered whether he would be better suited to run for the leadership of Reform UK.

**Yeah, annoying to be honest. Out touch silver spoon hypocrite**

*Ben, youth worker, Swindon*

**He's not relatable.**

*Faye, stay at home mum, Swindon*

**Was saying all the right sort of things but felt like an AI generated script kind of thing. Just hey, what would make me sound popular? Plus the playing with the dog thing was a little bit too much in his creepy suit, his three piece suit**

*Steven, Store Manager, Welwyn*

# Priti Patel: the voters' verdict



## Voters' overall assessment

Somewhat perversely Patel's challenge comes from being the most well-known of all of the candidates - but given people's views of the last Government that name recognition is a big down side. Having seen her in Government, most people felt she had too much baggage and was too divisive to lead the country. Some did like the fact that she was 'tough and direct' and she appealed more to some Reform switchers and particularly to Loyal Conservatives, but struggled to have appeal beyond these groups.

*'I think she is one of the people who has been fuelling the flames - Simon, Private School teacher, Shropshire North*

*'She comes across really well .... It did sort of feel more that she was saying what she means'  
- Emma, Childminder, Stockton*

# Priti Patel's appeal: the strengths

Unlike other candidates whose views have been largely formed in response to the materials we tested, most participants views of Priti Patel were already formed - which worked in her favour with loyal Conservatives and Reform Switchers, who knew that she sits on the 'right' of politics.

The groups liked Patel's 'tough and direct' pitch and thought she represented strength. They also liked that she wasn't frightened to upset people - and in a similar way to Nigel Farage would 'tell it like it is' rather than worrying what newspapers would say about her, although this was limited to the loyal Conservatives and Reform switcher groups.

**I quite like her. I think you know what you're getting with her. I think she's quite direct and sticks by her beliefs. I don't think she's frightened to upset people and I think quite a strong leader and strong character**

*Ian, Fire Protection Stockton*

**I like her quite a lot and I actually kind of don't mind that (she is divisive), but I just feel like she'd be in the cross hairs and it would be too much about Priti Patel and not the job at hand**

*Andy, British Airways, Henley*

**I do think she's a strong person who doesn't give a monkeys what anybody thinks about her. I think that she would, if she got her teeth into things, she would enforce it**

*Glenda, Admin Officer, Rother Valley*

# Priti Patel's appeal : the challenges

Despite her image of strength, Patel faces significant challenges because of her record in Government. For a party in desperate need of unity and building a big tent, many felt Patel represented more division and baggage of the past when most voters wanted a break from it.

A surprising number of people had heard about the bullying allegations which dented her appeal across groups, as did her failure to reduce levels of immigration as Home Secretary and being the brainchild of the Rwanda scheme which Reform voters tended to think was a gimmick.

If she became LOTO she would have to convince people she could work with others and build bridges and that there wouldn't simply be division and bomb throwing.

**I think she was one of the most divisive people in the party. So no, I wouldn't, I wouldn't put her down as a good leader**

*Tim, Risk Manager, Rother Valley*

**I'm really not a fan of Priti Patel. I think she's a bully. I just don't like her. I've never liked her**

*Natalie, Dance Teacher, Shropshire North*

**She was irritating me a lot. Again, out of touch, the way she was talking, the mannerisms. I switched off after about five seconds of that. Yeah, didn't take to her at all to be honest**

*Ben, youth worker, Swindon*

# Mel Stride: the voters' verdict



## Voters' overall assessment

Most people knew almost nothing about Mel Stride and didn't see him as a potential leader because they weren't excited by him and he didn't manage to stand out in the same way others did - instead thinking he represented your typical Conservative. Although some people did think he came across as positive, decisive and assured and a few participants absolutely loved his voice which they compared to David Attenborough and suggested he ought to have a career in Audio Books.

*Yeah, he's very vanilla' - Coral, nursery administrator, Henley*

*It's just another dull template. There's a real lack of spark - Matt, Printer, Rother Valley*

# Mel Stride's appeal : the strengths

While Stride didn't wow any of the focus groups, people felt that he appeared positive and assured - and liked his voice which they felt was commanding.

People didn't feel like Stride would be as divisive as some of the other candidates and could see him running a steady ship in contrast to what had come before.

On top of that appeal, the strength of his candidacy was that he was completely unknown and represented a 'starting from scratch again' opportunity, as no one was aware he served in Sunak's cabinet.

**I think it's sort of starting from scratch again, so I'd almost go for the least known face, which maybe is Mel Stride**

*Joe, IT, Shropshire North*

**He came across as quite positive. He was saying all the right things, and I actually quite liked him**

*Kate, Customer Service Assistant, Great Yarmouth*

**I think he seemed more relatable and I know I keep going back to them being posh, but he seemed like he would be a bit more relatable**

*Shelly, Admin Officer, Great Yarmouth*



# Mel Stride's appeal: the challenges

The main challenge facing Mel Stride's appeal with voters is that he didn't have 'stand out' characteristics like other candidates. Many people said he fitted the image of what they expected from an MP, but that didn't mean that they could see him as a leader.

The risk is that while Stride is relatively inoffensive to many, he also comes across as too generic or vanilla and wouldn't be able to make an impact against Starmer (who suffers from many of the same criticisms).

If he became LOTO, Stride would have to convince people that he had some pizzazz which so far hasn't come across and articulate a clearer vision of himself and what he stands for.

**To be honest, I found him quite boring**

*Kelly, Admin Officer, Welwyn*

**Didn't really sound like a Prime Minister. Just felt like another one tagging along saying sort of generic things**

*James, Software Developer, Stockton*

**It's just another dull template. There's a real lack of spark**

*Matt, Printer, Rother Valley*

# Tom Tugendhat: the voters' verdict



## Voters' overall assessment

Of all the candidates Tugendhat came across as the most 'Prime Ministerial', people felt he had a proper military background, was believable, charismatic and had more gravitas than any of the other candidates. Ultimately, he fit the part for lots of people and they liked that he hadn't always just toed the line and wasn't associated with the past. He particularly appealed to Liberal Democrat and Labour switchers. But some worried thought he was too posh or even too old for the job and he risked coming across as David Cameron 2.0

*James, AV Manager, Welwyn: He did come across a lot more natural and a lot more believable. He's had that experience of managing and directing people in very, very tough situations*

*Elaine, Retired Business owner, Great Yarmouth: No passion, but straight to the point, but he just lacked a bit of oomph*

# Tom Tugendhat's appeal: the strengths

The strength of Tugendhat's appeal stems from the feeling among many of the voters that he was Prime Ministerial. They liked that he came across clearly, had presence and gravitas - which meant that people could credibly imagine him speaking to them as Prime Minister in a way they couldn't immediately with some other candidates.

He also scored strongly as someone who was believable and honest, who was unafraid to admit what had gone wrong in the past and this made him seem authentic in comparison to some of other candidates.

His military service was also popular across the board and many drew a direct link between his experience of serving the armed forces with the job of Conservative leader and potentially Prime Minister.

**I thought he seemed really authentic. He said things in a different way to the others. Tom seemed slightly different. He seemed fresher, he seemed not tainted by what the Conservatives had done in the past**

*Hannah, company secretary, Henley*

**I think I would probably put him down as more prime ministerial**

*Tim, Risk Manager, Rother Valley*

**I quite liked him. It was what he said that stuck in my head. He was saying things, short sentences, getting to the point what he wanted to do. I quite liked him.**

*Becky, NHS Worker, Great Yarmouth*

# Tom Tugendhat's appeal: the challenges

While the feeling that Tugendhat was prime ministerial was strong, there were also concerns from some that he was another posh Tory. If he becomes LOTO, Tugendhat would have to convince people that he wasn't just another identikit Tory politician (another David Cameron) and that he understood people's everyday concerns.

There were also some concerns that Tugendhat was too old for the job - some thought he came across as tired in some videos. Another challenge he would have to address as LOTO.

Tugendhat was particularly popular with Labour and Liberal Democrat switchers, and his military service was popular with Reform voters.

**I switched off, he just didn't come across as very dynamic'**

*Paul, sales manager, Swindon: '*

**He seemed like posh mannerisms and things like that, but ex-military man served in a Iraq overseas, he might know what he's talking about**

*Oliver, Software Engineer, Stockton*

**I didn't like him. It just reminded me of a normal Sandhurst Officer, someone who's educated, talks the talk, but can't walk the walk.**

*Ray, Cleaner, Great Yarmouth*

# Conservative members and the leadership election

The first nine groups were conducted with voters who the Conservative's lost between 2019-2024 and who they will need to win back if they are to regain office.

A tenth focus group was conducted with Tory members.

Strikingly, despite the perceptions of the Tory membership, we heard similar things to what we had heard with the general public - both on the reasons why the Conservatives lost the election and their views on the six candidates vying to be leader.

**They seem to plot against each other and there was too much in-house fighting. There was no consistency. There was no united front. I think that's what people want. They want a united party that can stand by each other, support each other and go forward. It was just a shambles**

*Angela, Admin Manager, Farnham*

**I think it came to the point where the Pantomime became about the characters rather than about their policies. And all the news was about how she said that and he did that and it all became insular and about them**

*John, IT Director, Godalming*

**I think the Government was incompetent in many ways over the last few years, and there's so many examples of things that they've done wrong. There was a lack of will to implement Brexit properly, to sort out the Civil service, to really get to grips with immigration. And I think people just lost confidence**

*James, Company Director, Guildford*

## **Section 3**

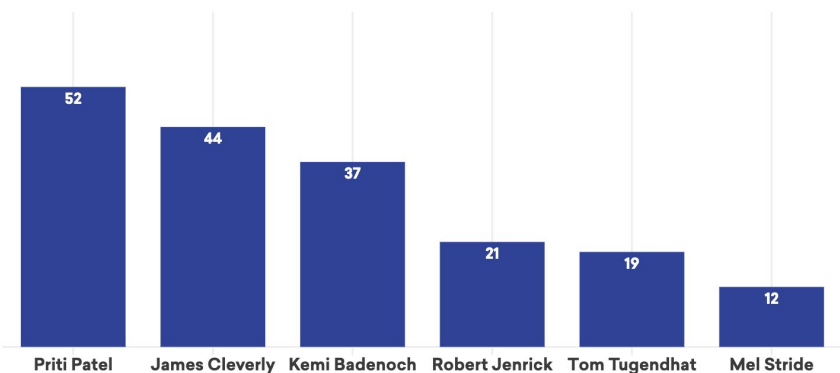
Conservative candidates -  
head-to-head

# Few know much about most of the candidates

Priti Patel is the only candidate where more than half the public can correctly identify who she is from a photo. Among 2024 Conservative voters, Priti Patel, James Cleverly and Kemi Badenoch are the only candidates where more than half of 2024 Conservative voters correctly identify them.

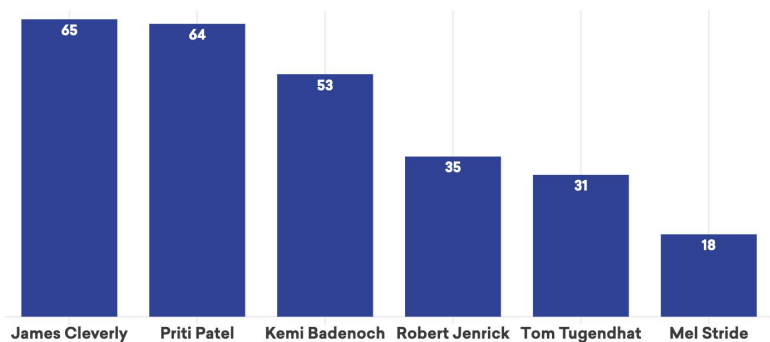
## Public awareness of the candidates

Respondents are shown a photo and asked to choose from a list of names who the person in the photo is.  
[% selecting correct answer among general public]



## Conservative voters' awareness of the candidates

Respondents are shown a photo and asked to choose from a list of names who the person in the photo is.  
[% selecting correct answer among 2024 Conservative voters]

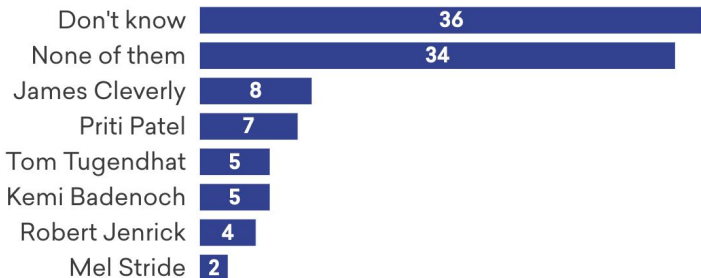


# Which candidate is most likely to win next election?

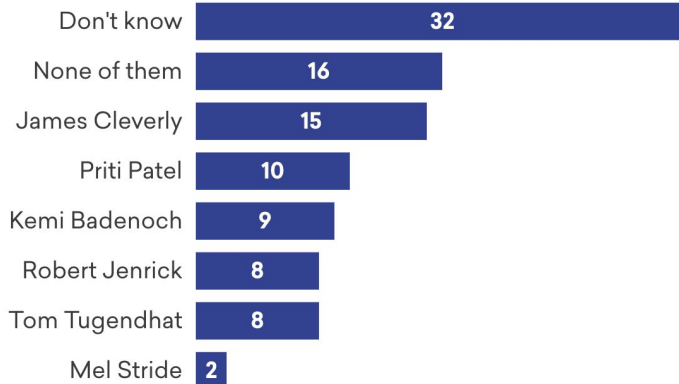
Most of the public either don't know which candidate is most likely to make the Conservatives win the next election or believe that none of the candidates make that more likely. However, among the public and 2024 Conservative voters James Cleverly is seen as the candidate most likely to help the Conservatives win the next general election

**There are six candidates standing to be leader of the Conservative Party. Who of the following potential leaders do you think would make the Conservatives most likely to win the next election?**

Population



2024 Conservative Voters





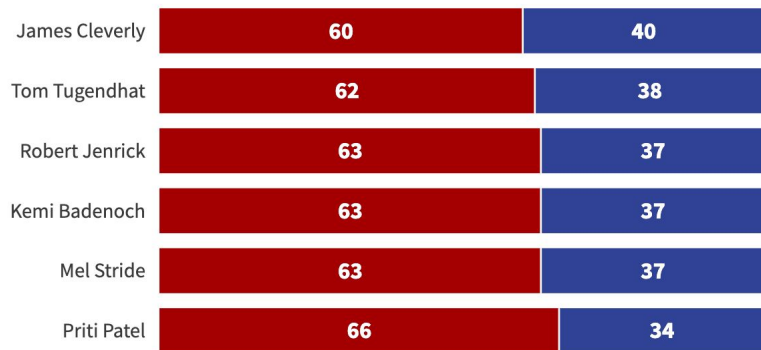
# Head to head - candidates versus Keir Starmer

James Cleverly performs best in head to heads with Keir Starmer with both the general public and with Conservative-Labour switchers - although the margin is more significant among Conservative-Labour switchers than the general public

## Who do you think would make the better Prime Minister?

[General public]

● Keir Starmer ● Candidate

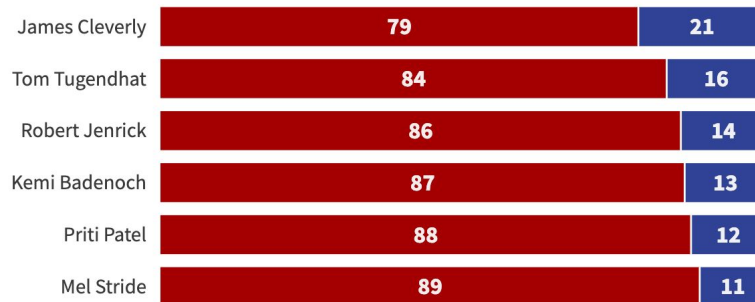


## Who do you think would make the better Prime Minister?

[Conservative to Labour switchers]

● Keir Starmer ● Candidate

Candidate



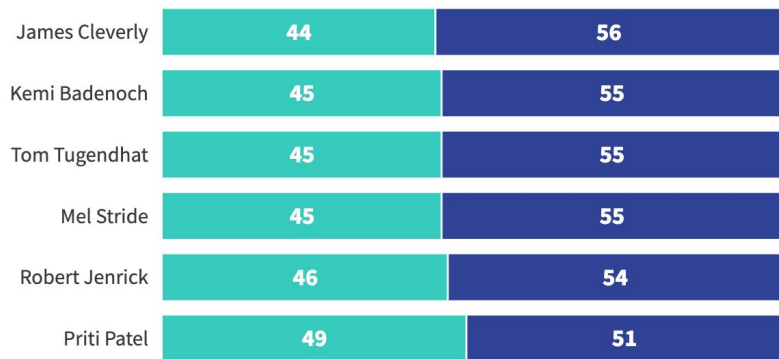
# Head to head - Farage versus candidates

James Cleverly and Kemi Badenoch perform best in a head-to-head against Nigel Farage with the general public. With Conservative to Reform switchers, these voters overwhelmingly back Farage over any of the candidates

## Who do you think would make the better Prime Minister?

General Public

● Nigel Farage ● Candidate

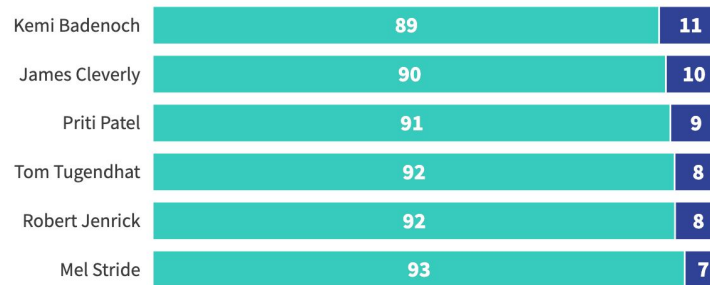


## Who do you think would make the better Prime Minister?

[Conservative to Reform UK switchers]

● Nigel Farage ● Candidate

Candidate



# For more information

Visit: [www.moreincommon.org.uk](http://www.moreincommon.org.uk)



More in  
Common