

FOX
RULES
OK



‘Fox Rules OK’ is based upon a speech first given to Conservative Voice by the Rt Hon Dr Liam Fox MP at the Conservative Party Conference in Manchester, 2023.



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Introduction

Good government is not just about a series of initiatives. Nor is it just about being better technocrats than our opponents. It ought to begin with clear first principles which are then translated into cogent and consistent policies.

All too often in recent times across the Western democratic world, disparate and even contradictory ideas have been flung together into the same political programmes. It has become increasingly prevalent among so-called 'populist' governments where the appeal to single interest groups (or focus groups) has taken precedence over a coherent, definable, and defensible narrative.

Governments who want to set out a clear vision for their electorates need to have an accessible story that explains the direction, aims and values of the government. Having a 'why' is as important as a 'what' in politics.

Conservatives are not just another brand in political marketing but come with an inherent set of values

and a sense of tradition and identity for our country. When we set out our beliefs, millions of people across Britain recognise that they share our approach, making us electorally strongest.

Here are a few of those Conservative beliefs, in no particular order, which I believe we need to explain to every generation of voters. There are many more than these, but it is a start.

SECURITY

National security is the first duty of the government. That means protecting the country and its people from outside threats, seen and unseen.

A Conservative government must be willing to spend what is necessary to achieve this, even if it means diverting funding away from other areas of domestic spending. Maintaining wider security includes controlling our borders and diminishing our strategic dependence by improving elements such as food security and energy security.

TAX

A low tax economy is not just an abstract idea but fits in with our ideas of personal responsibility by limiting the size of government, increasing individual choice, and providing greater incentives for those who want to generate the prosperity from which we all benefit.

COMPETITION

Competition is how we measure our talents against one another in society without conflict. It leads to greater innovation, is a spur to excellence, and encourages creativity.

The role of the state is not to stop there being winners and losers, but to ensure that the successes of the winners are shared amongst all.

WORK

No one should ever be better off not working than working. If the only value that anyone knows they have is what the state gives them to do nothing, how can they know what they might be to themselves, their families, and their communities?

Rewarding work is not simply an economic but a moral crusade, encouraging dignity and pride as well as self-reliance.

Dignity, we should remember, is the partner of responsibility.

PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITY

Personal responsibility is the key to a stable and free society. The bigger the state, the smaller the citizen.

In a free society, people should be willing to shoulder their own personal responsibilities, profit from their own efforts and be accountable for their own actions. The state should limit itself to what only the state can do and not interfere in areas where individuals, communities and other institutions could operate effectively and efficiently.

Allowing individuals to abdicate their personal responsibility onto the state weakens, not strengthens, society.

We have a duty to help those who cannot help themselves, but we do not have a duty to help those who will not help themselves, who have the ability and talents, but choose not to do so.

FREE MARKETS, FREE TRADE

Free markets are the combined wisdom of millions of individual consumers making their own choices, rather than the applied “wisdom” of political or economic elites.

Free markets do not work, however, if failure is rewarded the same as success, which is why moral hazard should not be removed by government.

Free trade has been the mechanism by which we have removed billions from poverty in the last generation, one of the greatest achievements in human history.

Protectionism does not lead to greater prosperity in the long term, is a short-term political illusion, and is likely to lead to greater global instability and migration.

Free trade, however, is not “a free for all”; it needs to operate within international rules and consensus if it is to be universally accepted and applied.

MONEY

There is no such thing as government money, only taxpayers' money, whether that money comes from individual taxpayers or business taxpayers.

It is not acceptable to spend the money of the next generation today to buy political popularity. Borrowing is simply taxation that is deferred to later with taxpayers having to pick up the bill eventually, usually after the political spenders have left office.

No one, and no country, can continually live beyond their means without the risk of impoverishing others, especially the young of tomorrow.

DIVERSITY AND COMMONALITY

Diversity in society is enriching and a key component of freedom. However, if we only celebrate our diversity and not our commonality, then we will not end up with diversity, but fragmentation and ghettoisation.

In a healthy society, different is good but separate is dangerous, threatening social cohesion and tolerance.

OPPORTUNITY

When we think about opportunity in our society, we must remember that it is not just about getting from the second rung of the ladder to the top. It is just as important to get from the bottom rung of the ladder to the second bottom rung.

Opportunity is not only for the most able but must be for all if we are to create genuine social mobility where talents and efforts are fully rewarded.

MERITOCRACY

Meritocracy is essential for a free and mobile society and should lie at the heart of Conservative beliefs.

It should not matter what our parents did, where we come from, our gender, race, or creed. Individuals should be valued for the skills that they have and the efforts that they will bring to the betterment of themselves, their communities, and their country. They should not only be enabled but encouraged to use their talents and reminded that they have a responsibility as well as a right to use those talents for the common good.

THE RULE OF LAW

A fair and equitable application of the law is not only the basis for a civilised society but is one of the things for which the United Kingdom is most renowned and internationally respected. The law must apply equally to the governing and the governed and without regard to wealth, race, religion, politics, or any other personal characteristic.

Access to justice and fair representation in a system where we will ultimately be judged by a jury of our peers is a prerequisite for social stability and personal responsibility.

FAMILY

Strong families provide a stable base for both our wider society and for the individuals within it.

Of course, the definition of families has changed over time. But the principle that those who provide stability, security and nurture should be encouraged and rewarded ought to be a central tenet of Conservative belief.

EDUCATION

Education is the key to a meritocratic society, which is why we must ensure that quality education is provided to all.

The point of ensuring good educational provision is that we maximise the potential of our society by maximising the potential of each individual within it. That means avoiding a one size fits all approach to education and recognising that children will have a range of talents that need to be nurtured, both academic and vocational.

It is essential that our teachers are properly valued and of adequate quality so that our children are educated with professionalism and objectivity, and that we do not allow political fashion and doctrine to be dressed up as education.

OPINION POLLS

We all read them but polls during a parliament are a snapshot of government popularity. Take them with a pinch of salt. Governments have come back from big deficits to win. Elections are different. They are a choice about future governments.

THE VISION THING

Politics is not about statistics or policies or targets. It is about stories. We need a narrative to tell people what sort of future we want, what sort of country we will be, and what sort of world we want to shape.

In the late 1970s, there was a growing desire for people to become homeowners at a time when millions were trapped in post-war council properties. The Conservatives, under Margaret Thatcher, decided that we would be unequivocally on their side and the revolution in homeownership began with the widespread sale of council houses.

It was the act of faith that enabled us to gain political support for our wider reforms and which kept us in government for 18 years without the need for any coalition.

What is the equivalent of that social desire today? I believe it is to own and run a business (although home ownership still matters). Contrary to what you might believe by watching our media, 82.5% of all jobs in this country are in the private sector with

only 17.5 in the public sector. Of those private sector jobs, 61% are in the SMEs – small or medium-sized enterprises.

In other words, over 50% of all jobs in the United Kingdom are in small businesses. That is the aspirational part of our population that we need to give our unequivocal support to in the 21st-century.

The Conservative party should be the natural party of choice for every white van man and woman in this country and every white coat man and woman in our emerging tech sector.

We may have the right policies but if we can't tell them as a story, no one will be listening.