

# How to win my vote

By Rod Liddle

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The repeated injunction that we should all ‘move on’ from worrying our silly heads about partygate is as otiose as it is arrogant. It is also, of course, a case of wishful thinking at its most extreme. And yet I hear it every day, on TalkRadio, on GB News, from pro-Conservative friends on Facebook and so on. Listen, you Tories, you need a new strategy, because ‘it’s time to move on’ hasn’t worked. Indeed, a good million or two voters have moved on and according to the polls will not be voting Conservative at the next election, if ever again.

Nor is it any use whining about how we have all become obsessed about the Prime Minister eating a piece of cake when there’s a war going on and a cost-of-living crisis. It is not about a piece of cake. It is about the complacency, arrogance and entitlement of an administration which broke its own stupid rules on 16 occasions and then proceeded to lie about it all to MPs and to the House of Commons. In other words, it is an important issue and tells you something about the tenor of our government. It is no use trying to tell voters that it is all a storm in a smashed prosecco flute, because they are not wearing it.

Nor is it any use trying to tell them, hey, look at Starmer – he did exactly the same thing! No, he didn’t. He had a drink and a curry with unspeakably awful party comrades in some frowsy hall in County Durham. He probably shouldn’t have done so. He was also stupid to insist that the Prime Minister should resign if he were investigated by the police because now, by his own lights, Starmer should resign because the Durham plod are investigating him. But still, what Starmer did is not in the same league as what the government got up to. You may think it is, but that is because you are partisan. None of the rest of us feel the same way.

So you need a different strategy and preferably one which involves getting shot of Boris Johnson pronto, or at least before the end of the year, because those of us who are not paid-up members of the Conservative party but nonetheless entrusted our votes to the Tories last time around are possessed of a great fear and dread. The nightmare involves that wee authoritarian Krankie woman from north of the border, the asinine lump of meat with mittens Ed Davey and Sir Keir himself united in some electoral deal which will lead us at some point in 2024 to wake up and discover that that ghastly woman who looks like Velma from Scooby-Doo is our foreign secretary, David Lammy is in charge at the Home Office, and the grim, thin-lipped pall-bearer Ian Blackford is at Health. I accept that a government led by Jeremy Hunt doesn’t fill me with a great deal of cheer either, but hell – any port in a storm.

Once Boris is gone, the new leader should commit him- or herself to telling the truth from time to time, rather than lying almost reflexively as the first response to any burgeoning crisis. It is a habit which demeans government, of course, and it is by no means confined to No. 10. Dissembling and fibbing now runs through government departments. They lie brazenly and when found out, they start the dissembling.

To give you an instance of this, let me direct you to the badger cull – a hugely unpopular and provenly useless policy, yet one to which the government, in its stupidity, still cleaves. I realise that most of you Conservatives don't give a monkey's about badgers, or perhaps actively hate them. You may even go out yourselves of an evening with a lantern and a claw hammer, hunting these creatures down. But this is not about badgers, per se. It is about telling the truth, or, more to the point, the government's inability to do so – and its deviousness.

In March the respected medical journal *Vet Record* produced an independent, peer-reviewed study of the efficacy of the badger cull and its success or otherwise in preventing the spread of bovine tuberculosis in cattle. The review suggested that the cull had been of pretty much no use whatsoever in this regard.

The Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs responded with figures of its own which completely contradicted those published in *Vet Record*. It also cast doubt upon the integrity of the researchers by suggesting that they were *parti pris* and had 'manipulated' data, and further said it was 'disappointed' to see the figures published in a scientific journal. The misinformation – for that is what it was – put out by Defra was allowed to exist in the public domain for six weeks, thereby suggesting to the public that a bunch of bunny-huggers were having a go at the badger cull again but that the real figures showed the cull was working.

On 10 May, after repeated correspondence with the *Vet Record* research team, the government at last came clean. It apologised fully to *Vet Record* and the researchers and admitted its own calculations were totally wrong. One of the *Vet Record* authors, Tom Langton, said: 'We've looked at all the available data – ten times as much as Defra – whereas it appears that Defra have carefully selected only some of the data they thought would serve their purposes.

'We asked them four times for it, but they have just stonewalled us for five weeks, before eventually admitting it was Defra themselves who had manipulated the data used for their calculations. Once the correct figures were used, Defra's claims simply didn't stack up. They would have got away with it if we hadn't studied the data so closely.'

A government free of that kind of chicanery would appeal to me and, I think, to many others.

## Metric or imperial

'I don't think it matters if you choose metric or imperial.' It's no use trying to tell voters that it is all a storm in a smashed prosecco flute, because they are not wearing it