



Conservatism in the Anglosphere: a
Tour d'Horizon

Lord Daniel Hannan of Kingsclere

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INSTITUTE

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About the Danube Institute

The Danube Institute, established in 2013 by the Batthyány Lajos Foundation in Budapest, serves as a hub for the exchange of ideas and individuals within Central Europe and between Central Europe, other parts of Europe, and the English-speaking world. Rooted in a commitment to respectful conservatism in cultural, religious, and social life, the Institute also upholds the broad classical liberal tradition in economics and a realistic Atlanticism in national security policy. These guiding principles are complemented by a dedication to exploring the interplay between democracy and patriotism, emphasising the nation-state as the cornerstone of democratic governance and international cooperation.

Through research, analysis, publication, debate, and scholarly exchanges, the Danube Institute engages with centre-right intellectuals, political leaders, and public-spirited citizens, while also fostering dialogue with counterparts on the democratic centre-left. Its activities include establishing and supporting research groups, facilitating international conferences and fellowships, and encouraging youth participation in scholarly and political discourse. By drawing upon the expertise of leading minds across national boundaries, the Institute aims to contribute to the development of democratic societies grounded in national identity and civic engagement.

About the Authors



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Conservatism in the Anglosphere: a Tour d'Horizon

Lord Daniel Hannan of Kingsclere, David Oldroyd-Bolt

Abstract

Though the political challenges facing each of the five Anglosphere nations differ in their specific manifestations, they display striking similarities at a broader level. Across the English-speaking world, mainstream conservative parties have struggled to respond to economic stagnation, mass migration, cultural polarization, declining public trust in institutions, and the political aftershocks of the COVID-19 pandemic. This paper examines how these pressures have reshaped conservatism in the United Kingdom, Australia, New Zealand, Canada, and the United States, and considers the prospects for conservative politics across the Anglosphere in the years ahead.

Foreword – the Lord Hannan of Kingsclere

Not long before he died in 2006, Ralph Harris told me something fascinating. The founder of the Institute of Economic Affairs had watched as the Second World War crushed classical liberalism under its tank treads. Five years of mobilisation had fundamentally altered the relationship between state and citizen. Voters expected their governments to run coalmines, shipping lines, schools, steelworks, hospitals, houses.

What were free-marketeers to do? Some wanted to withdraw, like Irish monks copying out their sacred scriptures during the Dark Ages, keeping civilization alive at the uttermost rim of the world.

But Ralph was not interested in reading papers to the Mont Pelerin Society. He wanted to drive back Leviathan. The challenge was to find the right vehicle.

The *dirigiste* mood of the times had done for the Liberal Party. Dominant before the First World War, it collapsed to less than three per cent of the popular vote in the 1951 and 1955 elections. Labour, for its part, aimed to nationalise anything that moved. That left only the Conservatives, despite their imperialist, paternalist, and vaguely protectionist tendencies.

Ralph and his friends set about educating individual Tory MPs: Nick Ridley, Geoffrey Howe, Enoch Powell and, most consequentially, Keith Joseph, who became Margaret Thatcher's John the Baptist.

For all his contagious optimism, Ralph never kidded himself that small-staters were other than a pressure group within the Conservative Party. Even during the Thatcher years, he understood that she was there on sufferance, and that her MPs would turn on her the moment she stopped winning (as indeed they did).

Thatcher's brand of Manchester liberalism never colonised the Conservative Party. At best, it formed a contingent alliance with mainstream Toryism – an unequal alliance, it should be added, for the free-marketeers were always the minority. Thatcher was like a mahout on the back of a massive elephant. The beast was moved by its own instincts – patriotism, religious faith, respect for hierarchy, distaste for indecency, unease about social change.

A skilled rider could coax it, whisper in its vast ear, nudge it this way or that. But only up to a point. Thatcher knew better than to jab her goad too harshly. In every year that she was prime minister, for example, there was a net rise in public expenditure – although, overall, the economy grew faster than the government.

The free-marketeers in the Tory Party – what the Americans call FreeCons, to distinguish them from NatCons – knew that they needed allies. They consciously focused on the issues where they agreed with the NatCons, such as welfare reform and Euroscepticism, eschewing self-indulgent arguments about drugs and porn. They were, to borrow another American term, this one from their own time, fusionists.

For precisely the same process was playing out on the American Right at exactly the same moment. Before the 1950s, US parties did not divide neatly along a Left/Right axis; they were as much regional as ideological.

The American realignment was driven by Bill Buckley, the clever, eloquent, handsome editor of the National Review. He brought together everyone who disliked socialism: patriots, strict constitutionalists, evangelical Christians, supporters of Israel, business people, social conservatives, libertarians. Hence the name “fusionism”; and, though it had its critics (the mighty conservative intellectual Russell Kirk used to argue that he had even less in common with libertarians than he had with socialists), it worked, paving the way for Ronald Reagan's ascendancy.

For those of us who came of age during the 1980s – bliss was it in that dawn to be alive, but to be young was very heaven – it can be quite an effort to realise how contingent and exceptional that alignment was. For most of Britain's previous history, Liberals and Conservatives (before them Whigs and Tories, before them Roundheads and Cavaliers) had constituted the opposite poles of our political system.

What made them bury their differences was the threat of socialism, both in the form of massed Soviet T72s and in the more insidious form of Western fifth columnists. Perhaps it should not surprise us that, with the ebbing of that threat, the Thatcher/Reagan alloy has begun to separate into its distinct Tory and Whig elements.

This paper explores the process of that demerger across the Anglosphere. It focuses on the English-speaking world because, in other advanced democracies, the party system developed differently.

In most of Western Europe, the liberal and conservative traditions formed separate and often antagonistic parties. In German, Italy and the Low Countries, Christian Democrats tended to be conservative on social questions and centrist on economics, and so naturally fought elections against Liberals, who tended to be *laissez-faire* on both. For this reason, during the years of British EEC/EU membership, the Tories struggled to find allies outside the Nordic world (and, even there, only the Independence Party of Iceland was a properly close fit).

It is tempting to put these differences down to “culture”, but culture is not some numinous entity that subsists alongside a nation’s institutions; it is a product of those institutions. To a large degree, the fusionism pursued by Ralph Harris and Bill Buckley was a product of first-past-the-post voting, or variants of it, which tended to encourage a two-party system. What is happening now is highly inflected by differences in the voting methods among the Anglosphere democracies.

Most countries have seen a more authoritarian form of conservatism since the start of the last decade. Its causes are beyond the scope of this paper. Perhaps it has to do with the 2009 financial crisis, which served to delegitimise markets in the eyes of many voters, convincing them that governments could spend colossal sums when they chose. Perhaps it is a consequence of increasing migratory flows, and a commensurate rise in ethnic voting. Perhaps its toots lie in the spread of smartphones after 2012, and the consequent shrinking of voters’ attention spans and increasing unwillingness to recognise trade-offs.

Whatever the explanation, it was exacerbated by the lockdown and furlough policies pursued from March 2020, which fundamentally altered the relationship between government and citizen, prompting expectations of a much more activist state.

How, then, does the rise of a more authoritarian conservatism play out in different Anglosphere states? How has it affected the existing party systems and why? To repeat, the explanations lie largely in different approaches to the voting rules.

In the United Kingdom, the Reform Party has outpolled the Conservative Party for over a year. We may simply be witnessing one of the periodic re-orderings of our party system, in which a challenger displaces an incumbent. It last happened between the wars, when Labour took over from the Liberal Party. True, it has not happened before to the Tories who, under various names, have existed for around 350 years – a truly astonishing and under-remarked record. Then again, nothing lasts forever, and the transition may already be underway.

In the United States, which on paper has the same voting system as Britain, the key factor is the party primary. Without primaries, a new party might edge aside an existing one, as the Republicans edged aside the Whigs in the 1850s. Primaries, however, mean that ideological changes happen *within* existing parties. Instead of going third party, as it would have done in Britain (or in the United States 200 years earlier), MAGA took over the Republican Party, transforming it so utterly from where it had been in the 2000s that it is now, to all intents and purposes, a different party, with new policies and new values.

In Australia, preferential voting means that the system tilts very suddenly, almost without warning. Australians often give their first preference to a minor party, but their second to the one that is best placed to prevent the outcome they dislike. They might, for example, vote for a fringe anti-immigration party, and then switch to the mainstream Liberal/National Coalition as one of the only two realistic parties of government, the surest way to block Labor. What, though, when the first preferences behind a minor party become more numerous than those of the incumbent? That is precisely what seems to have happened now, with Pauline Hanson’s One Nation, the Australian equivalent of Reform in the UK or MAGA in the United States, having outpolled the Coalition since October 2025.

New Zealand is the Anglosphere outlier, having elected its MPs through a multi-member proportional (MMP) system since 1996. It alone does not have a voting system designed for two blocs. Sure enough, the National Party, which had been dominant on the Right, and is a liberal-conservative party analogous to the British Conservatives or the pre-Trump US Republicans, has lost ground, as the Right-of-Centre dissolved into three ideological elements: libertarians (ACT), traditionalists (National) and populists (New Zealand First). At the time of writing, while National remains the largest party on the Right, the momentum is with New Zealand First, founded and led by Winston Peters, now 81.

Only Canada has kept something resembling the conservative parties of the 1990s, liberal on economics, conservative on culture. That its leader since 2022, Pierre Poilievre, has managed to maintain that coalition owes a great deal to his extraordinary tactical abilities.

What follows is David Oldroyd-Bolt's explanation of how all this has come about, and where it will go next. It is based on a series of interviews with leading figures in all the relevant parties, and I hope you will find it pleasing as well as informative.



*The new Banksy statue in London in Waterloo Place
(Shutterstock)*

Introduction

The Anglosphere – that is to say, the United Kingdom, Australia, Canada, New Zealand and the United States – may no longer be so alive to the “consciousness of the strong common interest existing between mature and independent equals, living in different parts of the world and confronted with different regional problems – but for that reason needing each other all the more in order to prevent regional influences from swamping their national identity”¹ that Sir Charles Johnston, Her Majesty’s High Commissioner to Australia, described in his valedictory despatch of April 1971. Fifty-five years of shifting geopolitical sands, altered allegiances and priorities (not least the United Kingdom’s entry into and then exit from the European Union), cultural ascendancies and declines have loosened the historic ties that bind us such that they are, perhaps, slacker than ever. Though politicians in each of the Anglosphere nations and of whatever ideological persuasion are apt to pay occasional lip service to the idea of our fraternity, they seem disinclined towards measures that would make it a tangible reality.

Yet the similarities of the problems we face, whether radical demographic change driven by migration, economic stagnation, political polarization or parliamentary impotence in the face of overmighty bureaucracy, are obvious and legion. Taking as fact that we remain more similar than we are different, this paper investigates the state of conservatism in the Anglosphere. A thorough interrogation of the subject would require a book-length piece, far beyond the scope of this. Instead, we intend to give an overview of the situation, considering polling data and first-hand testimony from politicians and activists (including that of its authors), along with analysis of historical trends, in an attempt to discern how conservatism has changed in each country over recent years, whether it has a future and what that may be, both as a movement and as an electoral force.

As the reader would expect, equal weight cannot be given to each of the five Anglosphere nations. Britain and Australia predominate by dint of the authors’ familiarity with them, the countries’ current political similarities and the amount of political testimony gathered. Canada and New Zealand receive the next greatest shares of our attention. Their lesser share of text must not be taken as lesser shares of our affection and regard.

The United States we consider as somewhat *sui generis*. As a consequence of its divergent history from and, until recently, far more greatly varied demographic composition than the four other constituents, this great republic has been at something of a remove from the core group. In the post-War period, its foreign policy has at times sought to emphasise that difference and at others to ameliorate it.

Depending upon the character and caprice of whoever occupied the White House, the relationship has been by turns warmly fraternal and coolly distant, though with a greater lean towards the former (the unfortunate Suez episode aside). These variations apart, and regardless of its more outré politicians’ feelings, one cannot reasonably deny that on the basis of its language alone the United States of America constitutes a vital organ of the Anglosphere.

Moreover, by sheer size and wealth, its political currents and cultural trends affect directly those of Britain, Canada, Australia and New Zealand – sometimes profoundly, as in the case of its many overseas ventures during the past thirty years.

We begin with the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, *fons et origo* of both conservatism and the Anglosphere.



TRUMP
MAKE AMERICA GREAT AGAIN

*Make America Great Again March Huntington Beach, CA
(Shutterstock)*

The United Kingdom

To its participants and close observers, the psychodrama of British conservatism is a tale told so frequently and at such length as to be grindingly tedious. Beginning (as I have argued in previous papers for this Institute) with the botched matricide of Mrs Thatcher in November 1990, the various factions of the Right have been engaged in warfare both open and guerrilla ever since. This is not to imply that the status quo ante was one of sweetness and harmony: the Conservative Party has long had an admirable way of governing while trying, with varying success, to cover open sores from public gaze.

Yet the savagery and glee of this combat were unusual. Leading Tory politicians wrote and spoke about one another in a vein of contempt rarely seen since the days of Appeasement in the 1930s or the debates over Catholic Emancipation in the 1820s. In both of those instances, however, though private discontent and mistrust remained for some time, public rancour subsided once the issue was settled decisively. Since Mrs Thatcher's defenestration, the political has been inextricable from the personal. In the same way that one identifies instinctively, intellectually and emotionally with either the Cavaliers or Roundheads of 17th century Britain, Conservative politicians were and are defined (and define themselves) by their attitude to Thatcher and Thatcherism.

Often, among observers and activists, this definition is stark, with partisans for each side. More usually among Parliamentarians there is an attempt at balance, one-the-one-hand versus on-the-other – though it does not take long for true preference, not to say allegiance, to be revealed. The prime movers of the Cameron project, for example, were so obviously more comfortable with the policies and personality of now-Sir Tony Blair than with the clear blue water of Thatcherism. The political landscape we now survey demonstrates quite how scorched the conservative earth has been left by these four decades of strife. Kemi Badenoch's Conservative Party has been stuck at around 17% in the polls for the past year, with Nigel Farage's Reform UK leading by between 9-13%.² Though Mrs Badenoch's parliamentary performances have shown notable improvement in recent months, following a commendable speech at her party's conference in October of last year, this has not yet been reflected by the notice paid to her or the Tories beyond Westminster.

True, Mr Farage has a lower net favourability rating than the Leader of the Opposition (-37 compared with her -26)³, but this does not signify a resurgence of Tory support. Rather, it demonstrates the degree to which Mr Farage is reviled by the left – a problem to which we will return. Lord Frost CMG, a Senior Visiting Fellow of the Danube Institute, and the former chief Brexit negotiator for the United Kingdom, was asked for his views on the general state of conservatism in the UK in light of recent defections by substantial Conservative MPs such as Danny Kruger and Suella Braverman to Reform UK, and of Mrs Badenoch's lacklustre performance as Tory leader.

“Lacklustre is the correct word to describe the broader situation. The failure of the Conservative Party to deliver meaningfully conservative or free market policies over the last decade, and the lack of trust this engendered, created Reform UK and what looks like a relatively durable split on the Right. The policy differences between the Conservatives and Reform now look fairly limited - the difference is in the degree of trust the two parties inspire among voters on the Right. There is a lack of energy among the Conservatives, and Reform has not yet properly broken out from its migration and culture war comfort zone. Neither party is yet campaigning on a proper diagnosis of the country's problems, still less a properly thought through prescription for solutions.”

This led to a discussion of whether there is still such a thing as mainstream conservatism in Britain.

“Probably but it is not reflected in the party structure. I think most voters on the Right would want a degree of market reform and shrinkage of the state, varying perhaps in how aggressively they would do this; national independence i.e. no chipping away at Brexit; and a government that can provide proper armed forces and defend Britain also as a country, its identity and history, its borders. I would see this as mainstream conservatism. There is a fringe on the left in the Conservative Party which I don't see as being really conservative and a fringe on the ethnonationalist right ditto. I think it is entirely possible that a united Right party or an electoral coalition could easily get 40-45% of the vote behind a programme such as the one I have described.”

He went on to say:

“At the moment each party is trying to eliminate the other as a meaningful threat (and the resultant policy competition has had some positive efforts in pulling both to the right place for mainstream conservative voters). It would be the best outcome if one succeeded. If this doesn't happen as the election approaches, then I suspect that there will be pressure to form some kind of electoral understanding. I can't see this happening with the current personalities so I suspect the most likely outcome, unless a big effort is made to resolve it, is that the Right will enter the election divided.”

This fear is well founded: according to polling by Lord Ashcroft KCMG,

“While 81 per cent of current Reform voters are Rightists whom we would expect back a Tory-Reform alliance, the same is true of just 53 per cent of current Conservatives. . . The results of this exercise reinforce the finding that a Tory-Reform alliance would shed about 10 points (in September 2025, the combined Reform and Conservative vote share was 47.6 per cent; the vote share of the hypothetical Reform-Conservative alliance was 34 per cent with a ceiling of 38.2 per cent). Crucially, it also pushes up the ceiling for Labour and the Lib Dems, suggesting that uniting the right in this way would boost tactical voting among left-of-centre voters.”⁴

Not only, therefore, as a matter of personality differences but in terms of sheer electoral calculus, an official Tory-Reform pact is impossible.

Neither their supporters nor their parliamentarians would wear such an alliance; the Left would benefit disproportionately by its encouraging tactical voting; the Conservative Party would most likely cease to exist.

Caught between the Scylla of irrelevance and the Charybdis of oblivion, what will the Conservative Party do? In the short to medium term, it is arguable that those of a similar hue to Lord Frost could best serve the nation's interests (and their own abilities) by following the suit of Mr Kruger and defecting to Reform UK with the intention of developing a comprehensive, conservative suit of policies for an election manifesto.

Concomitantly, the preponderance of serious intellectually and politically able people within Reform could serve to draw the sting from Mr Farage's presence as leader which, as we have seen, is a deterrent for many left-of-centre c/ Conservatives. By the same token, Mrs Badenoch's continuing as Leader of the Opposition would provide a vehicle for the cleverer 'Wets' who might be willing to countenance a 'drier' set of policies for electoral reasons without in any way believing in the prospectus; an undoubtedly disastrous course of action, as demonstrated by Major et al.

Were this to be the case, it is difficult to avoid a vision of Mrs Badenoch standing firm and resolute on the bridge of *HMS Tory* as it sinks beneath the waves after 400 years of if not quite plain, then at least continuous sailing. *Lusisti satis*.

As for Reform, the surest course is that upon which it is now set: continue making the points about immigration and culture which have gained it support so far, while developing a coherent and realistic economic policy to reassure both voters and markets.

It is precisely this combination of financial dependability and national pride, mastered by the Conservatives for so long yet failed in recent decades, which could lead a party of the right to Number 10 Downing Street.



Nigel Farage at a press conference celebrating 100,000 Reform members (Shutterstock)

Australia

There was a view for many years that, because of its voting system, Australia was somehow immune to the political flux of the past quarter century. Yet the disruption on both left and right that has been underway has now burst on to the wider political scene in just a few months, with consequences strikingly similar to those in Britain.

Since the last federal election in May 2025 a small party on the right, One Nation, has improved its position in the public polls considerably. One Nation, which has existed for thirty years, is typical of emergent parties of the right, with its focus on immigration, social disruption and declining living standards. Labor won the election last year with its second-lowest vote ever, relying on preferences from parties such as the Greens to win. (Similarly, the Labour Party in Britain won its landslide victory in the 2024 General Election with a vote share of 33.7%, an historical low and in large part a consequence of tactical voting.) After its defeat, the Liberal Party (akin to Britain's Conservative Party) went through a period of introspective soul-searching.

This left a gap in public debate against a weak Government. One Nation quickly filled the vacuum and are now ahead of the Liberals in opinion polls, leading by six points (albeit still 14 points behind Labor).⁵ Concerns about raised immigration and social cohesion were elevated yet further following the massacre at Bondi Beach on 14 December last year. This situation is comparable to the emergence of the Alternative für Deutschland (AfD) in Germany and Reform in the UK as a threat to the established centre-right party.

To understand how we arrived at this pass, one must begin with Scott Morrison, who served as the Prime Minister of Australia in the period 2018-2022. Morrison, a former marketing man of considerable natural cunning, had a gift for the slogan and a pronounced aversion to the responsibility that executive office entails. The phrase that will attach itself to his memory, "I don't hold a hose, mate," offered cheerfully to a radio presenter in explanation of his decision to take a secret family holiday to Hawaii during the catastrophic Black Summer bushfires of 2019-20 — was revealing not because it was, in the strictest sense, untrue, but because it expressed so precisely a governing temperament.

When questioned about his vacation during the fires, his response followed him into the 2022 election campaign, with protesters holding signs reminding him of the phrase at campaign appearances across the country. The pandemic offered Morrison an opportunity to remake his public image. He declined it. The Labor post-election review concluded that the government had politicized the management of the pandemic; when the Coalition failed on both establishing quarantine facilities and the vaccine rollout, this became a major negative factor.

The revelation that Morrison had secretly appointed himself to five ministerial portfolios—health, resources, home affairs, finance and treasury—largely without the knowledge of the ministers nominally responsible, prompted a judicial report describing the arrangements as bizarre and unnecessary. He became the first serving or former prime minister in Australian history to be censured by the House of Representatives.

The 2022 defeat was shattering. A review by former party director Brian Loughnane and Senator Jane Hume identified Morrison's personal unpopularity as the single most significant factor in Labor's victory. Behind the personal verdict, however, lay a structural problem: the proportion of voters identifying as permanent supporters of the same party fell to an all-time low of thirty-seven per cent in 2022 (compared with seventy-two per cent in 1967) while those who considered voting for another party during the campaign, at thirty-six per cent, had never been higher. The Coalition's support fell on both flanks at once: to 'Teal' independent candidates in formerly reliably liberal (with a small l) urban seats, and to Pauline Hanson's One Nation from the right.

As we began this section by noting, three years on, that rightward flow has reached something approaching a catastrophic haemorrhage. In the week of 19-25 January 2026, the Roy Morgan Poll recorded primary support for One Nation at 22.5 per cent. This put them ahead of the Liberal Party, on twenty per cent, for the first time in the party's history. The Liberal Party has changed leaders four times in four years, twice since being defeated in 2025. (By comparison, the British Conservative Party changed Leader three times in three months during 2022 while in Government and possessed of a large majority.)

Peter Dutton, who lost both the election and his seat, was succeeded by Sussan Ley, a feminist, a republican and a supporter of same-sex marriage. She was in turn ousted on 13 February this year by Angus Taylor. Taylor is a conventional centre-right leader in the mould of the former Austrian PMs John Howard and Tony Abbott, particularly aware of the need to address the concerns of people supporting One Nation (although this has yet to manifest itself in formal policies).

The Liberal Party has been unable to retain its own members of parliament: in the South Australian parliament, for instance, former members such as Dan Cregan in Kavel and Jing Lee are symptomatic of a party in which elected representatives no longer feel at home. Though One Nation has exploited the resulting ideological and factional instability with considerable skill, what has altered is not the nature of its appeal but the size of the audience receptive to it. Just as in the United Kingdom, at the heart of populist mobilization are voters' deep concerns about immigration, housing affordability and the cost of living, all of which anxieties have been inflamed by the specific economic dislocations of the post-pandemic years.

Pauline Hanson herself, with characteristic combativeness, has observed that she was doing what Donald Trump does long before the American president had thought of it. She is not entirely wrong. But what the Trump phenomenon provided was not a model but a demonstration, applicable around the world, that this style of politics could win.

I leave the final words on Australia to its former Prime Minister, and Senior Visiting Fellow of the Danube Institute, The Honourable Tony Abbott.

“The Australian Liberal-National Coalition is at a low ebb. We were a government that disappointed our strongest natural supporters and that badly lost the 2022 election. We were then in the box seat to win the 2025 election against an underwhelming Labor government, only to blow it because we failed to campaign for our pro-nuclear policy, failed to campaign against Labor’s unrealised capital gains tax policy, and failed to point out that the government had presided over the fastest decline in living standards in the developed world, made worse by bad policy.”

Then, having suffered the worst federal defeat in our history, we made a DEI pick for leader, and endured two messy coalition splits, before changing our leader earlier this year to begin – we hope – the long march back to the politics of conviction and competence.

High One Nation polling is a sign that voters are sick of politics as usual and are especially “over” a Liberal-National Coalition that doesn’t know what it stands for and is not a clear alternative to a bad Labor government. While ON are essentially a protest party that doesn’t aim to be the alternative government, some voters are so keen to punish the establishment, especially the LNP, that it won’t be at all easy to win them back.

In my judgment, the conservative side of politics is at its best when we’re the freedom party, the tradition party, and above all, the patriot party. I think at least half the electorate would vote for such a party provided they think it’s fair dinkum. And that’s our challenge as the LNP: to show people that we’ve changed our policies on hot button issues like energy and immigration from conviction and not just calculation.

Our situation is not dissimilar from that of the rest of the Anglosphere. Social and economic disruption is leading to political disruption too. In America, there was an internal takeover of the Republicans. In Britain, and perhaps now in Australia, there’s an external bidder for the conservative vote. The challenge, in both countries, is not to cannibalise the conservative vote but to maximise it by focussing on the mistakes of bad green-left governments. In good time for the next election, there needs to be a tight preference swap between the right-of-centre parties in Australia and some kind of an electoral pact in Britain. Otherwise, a divided right could perpetuate disastrous Labor governments. As always, what’s needed is leadership that’s both brave and principled but not unreasonable or over-confident.”

Mass
Migration
=
Silent
Invasion

New Zealand

New Zealand repays careful attention precisely because it runs against the dominant pattern in the other four nations. It is the country where the mainstream centre-right party has, for the moment at least, successfully negotiated the post-pandemic political landscape without being consumed by the forces that are devouring its counterparts elsewhere. Understanding why requires one to dwell for a moment on the political legacy of Jacinda Ardern, who was Prime Minister of New Zealand from 2017 to 2023, at various points, both the most admired and the most resented politician in the Anglosphere.

Ardern's "go hard and go early" approach to the pandemic earned New Zealand international adulation and, for a short time at least, great electoral results. The Labour Party won an outright majority in the 2020 election (the only party to do so under New Zealand's proportional system) thanks to the government's pandemic response. Yet it was that response which sowed the seeds of Labour's eventual undoing. Many New Zealanders had not forgiven Ardern for the longer-term handling of the pandemic: policies such as barring overseas New Zealanders from returning home, enforcing harsh lockdowns, mandating vaccination and refusing to engage with the protesters encamped outside Parliament all contributed to her declining popularity before her resignation. The High Court subsequently found some of those pandemic policies to have been unlawful.

This political dissatisfaction culminated in the 2023 election of the most conservative government New Zealand had seen in recent decades.

The current Prime Minister, Christopher Luxon, a former Air New Zealand chief executive who had been in politics for barely three years, led the National Party to victory in October 2023, forming a coalition with both the libertarian ACT party and the populist New Zealand First under Winston Peters. Like Nigel Farage, a veteran populist politician, Peters is one of those political figures who thrives despite commentators avowing repeatedly that he is finished. He is sometimes compared to Trump, but this misses the essential point: Peters is a coalition pragmatist of the first order, a man who has served in government with both National and Labour and who understands how to acquire influence without assuming sole responsibility for what influence produces. Again, Farage is the more apt comparison.

Unlike the claims made for Australia's electoral system, New Zealand's Mixed-Member Proportional electoral system has, in fact, served as a moderating mechanism. The five per cent threshold for parliamentary representation prevents very small parties from gaining parliamentary foothold. Once the barrier is cleared, they are integrated into coalition bargaining in ways that impose discipline. Peters holds the foreign affairs portfolio and the deputy prime ministership; cabinet collective responsibility ensures that he is bound by the same obligations as his coalition partners. This institutionalization of populism is precisely what has not happened in Australia, where One Nation operates freely outside the Coalition and may accumulate grievances without the inconvenience of having to answer for them in government. In this instance, most unusually, a proportional system has proved more effective at containing populism than a majoritarian system.



*Parliament House Wellington, New Zealand
(Shutterstock)*

Canada

Whereas New Zealand represents conservatism adapting to populism with moderate success, Britain and Australia represent its failures.

Canada, however, represents something more unusual: a mainstream conservative party that deliberately absorbed the insurgent energy of its populist challenger, rebuilt itself around that energy, came within touching distance of government, then discovered that the energy it had absorbed was lethal in circumstances it had not anticipated.

Pierre Poilievre's rise to the leadership of the Conservative Party of Canada in September 2022 was constructed, with real strategic intelligence, upon the ruins of the pandemic's political aftermath. The Freedom Convoy (the blockade of Ottawa and several border crossings by truckers and their supporters protesting against vaccine mandates) had galvanized a constituency that felt that the Trudeau government had treated its own citizens with contempt. Poilievre moved immediately. He launched his leadership campaign on 5 February 2022, as the blockades were entering their third week, with a video declaring: "I'm running for Prime Minister to give you back control of your life." He was elected leader seven months later with seventy per cent of party members' votes, the largest share ever recorded in a Conservative leadership contest.⁶

Poilievre's slogans were Trumpian in texture if not always in content: 'Fire the gatekeepers,' 'Axe the tax,' '#Justinflation'—phrases designed, like MAGA itself, to function simultaneously as policy shorthand and as badges of cultural identification. By late 2024, the strategy appeared to be succeeding remarkably. The Conservative Party held a twenty-five-point lead over Trudeau's Liberals in national polls and the election seemed Poilievre's to lose.

Donald Trump's return to the White House, his tariffs on Canadian exports and territorial remarks about Canada as the fifty-first state, shifted the political ground beneath Poilievre's feet with a speed that left his strategists disoriented.

Although Poilievre protested the against tariffs vigorously, his perceived stylistic and rhetorical similarities to Trump suddenly began to depress his polling figures. The Conservatives shed seven points in a matter of weeks and continued to fall. Against this backdrop, Mark Carney, former Governor of both the Bank of Canada and the Bank of England and Canada's sitting prime minister, the very model of Davos Man, proved a devastatingly well-suited opponent.

His technocratic credentials and forceful denunciations of American economic aggression contrasted sharply with Poilievre. Carney framed the election explicitly as a choice between competent statecraft and the kind of populist posturing that had already produced the chaos of Johnson-and-Truss in Britain.

The result was striking precisely because the Conservatives performed so well and still lost. Despite gaining 41.3 per cent of the popular vote⁷, they failed to secure a majority of seats. Poilievre lost his own Ottawa seat that he had held for twenty years.

The strategy of absorbed insurgency had left the party populist enough to repel moderate voters during a crisis that demanded reassurance, but insufficiently populist to construct the durable coalition of the discontented that Trump assembled in the United States. It had, in effect, produced the worst of both worlds.



Canada's federal Conservative leader, Pierre Poilievre, addressing supporters during his 'Canada First' rally (Shutterstock)

The United States

It is appropriate to conclude in Washington, not because the American story is least important but because the MAGA movement functions in this analysis as the originating template: the ur-text of Anglosphere populism from which other cases have drawn inspiration, vocabulary and, in some instances, direct strategic counsel.

President Trump achieved what no American conservative since Reagan had: the replacement of the Republican Party's fusionist ideology with something new. The MAGA movement staged an ideological hostile takeover of the Republican Party, displacing the three-legged stool of Reaganism (fiscal discipline, social traditionalism and hawkish internationalism) with a potent blend of national populism, economic protectionism and disruptive anti-institutionalism. Its potency lies in the division of society between a pure people and a corrupt elite, its rejection of the legitimacy of pluralist institutions and its insistence that the leader alone gives authentic expression to the popular will.

For many Trump supporters, the appeal was simultaneously economic and cultural. His willingness to challenge the supposed benefits of free trade and social and cultural globalization appealed both to those who had lost their livelihoods in the new world order and to those who sensed that a better way of life was being swept away.⁸ The COVID pandemic was, in the American case, not merely a health emergency but a cultural and political detonation. The Republican base's identification with anti-mandate, anti-restriction politics was forged in the crucible of 2020 and 2021 and has proved extremely durable.

The internal contradictions of the MAGA coalition are not difficult to identify, though they are rather harder to resolve. The Manhattan Institute's exhaustive survey of the Republican electorate, conducted in October 2025 with close to three thousand respondents⁹, reveals the structural fragility beneath the surface of apparent dominance: the coalition divides broadly between a longstanding core of consistently conservative established Republicans and a newer ring of younger, ideologically unstable entrants, of whom only fifty-six per cent said they would definitely vote Republican again in a congressional election.

This is the perennial problem of personality-cult politics: the coalition is bound to the leader rather than to the programme; the question of what follows the leader is therefore not merely a matter of succession but of structural survival.

Conservatism that is purely populist risks descending into a cult of personality that cannot outlast its founder. Conversely, a conservatism that retreats to early-2000s neoconservatism will likely find itself without a base. The challenge, perhaps, is to develop a constitutional populism: one that addresses genuine working-class grievances while operating within the guardrails of republican government.

Whether the Republican Party possesses the intellectual resources for such a synthesis is a question that remains open, to put it mildly.



*United States President Donald Trump
(Shutterstock)*

Conclusion

Burke, I think, would find the current predicament of Anglosphere conservatism at once deeply familiar and profoundly dismaying. Familiar, because the tension between conservation and adaptation, between institutional loyalty and popular energy, is as old as conservatism itself. Dismaying, because in all but one of the countries surveyed here, the mainstream conservative parties appear to have managed this tension with a singular lack of distinction. They governed poorly during the pandemic, alienated their own voters, then found themselves outflanked by insurgents who state clearly what the mainstream parties had spent years carefully refusing to say at all.

The COVID-19 pandemic functions, across our analysis, as an accelerant rather than a cause. Where they governed during the pandemic, they were judged and found wanting. Where they were in opposition, they acquired populist energy that stored up longer-term complications. Neither position was without its costs.

Although the MAGA example has been genuinely influential across the Anglosphere, its influence has been mediated by local conditions in ways that produce importantly different outcomes. In Canada, the MAGA aesthetic worked domestically until Trump himself rendered it a liability. In Australia, it has operated less through institutional channels than through the normalization of a style of politics that has benefited One Nation far more than the Liberal Party.

In New Zealand, the influence is visible in Peters' pandemic-adjacent rhetoric and ACT's ideological radicalism, disciplined by coalition institutions that impose obligations. It is perhaps in Britain, with Reform UK, that we see the most direct beneficiary of the Trump model. Nigel Farage understood, before almost anyone else in the United Kingdom, that the appetite for disruption on the right was real, large and very largely unserved by the Conservative Party.

The deeper question is whether the traditional conservative parties of the Anglosphere retain the institutional and intellectual resources to perform the essential conservative tasks of identifying what is worth preserving, changing without rupturing necessary continuity and building internal coalitions durable enough to govern. In Australia, the evidence is, at present, rather bleak. In Canada, the situation seems more hopeful. In New Zealand, there is at least a working model, however questionable the conservatism of its leader. In the United States, the question is inseparable from the question of Trump's own longevity and legacy. And in Britain, with which this analysis began and to which we have referred throughout, the Conservative Party is attempting something that its history suggests is possible, yet perhaps not from such a nadir: returning from apparently terminal decline to electoral success. Whether it can do so before Reform UK renders it obsolete is the most compelling open question in the politics of the English-speaking world.

Endnotes

¹Charles Johnston, quoted in Matthew Parris and Benedict Bryson (eds.), *Parting Shots* (London: Viking, 2010), 342.

²Politico, “Poll of Polls: United Kingdom,” accessed 17 March 2026, <https://www.politico.eu/europe-poll-of-polls/united-kingdom/>

³YouGov, “Political Favourability Ratings, January 2026,” accessed 17 March 2026, <https://yougov.com/en-gb/articles/53907-political-favourability-ratings-january-2026>

⁴Full polling data at Lord Ashcroft Polls, “Unite the Right, Hold the Centre? How Should the Conservatives Position Themselves in Britain’s Fragmented Politics?” February 2026, accessed 17 March 2026, <https://lordashcrofthpolls.com/2026/02/unite-the-right-hold-the-centre-how-should-the-conservatives-position-themselves-in-britains-fragmented-politics/>

⁵DemosAU and Ace Strategies, “Who Is Voting One Nation? Exclusive SA Polling Reveals Orange Hotspots,” InDaily (South Australia), 19 March 2026. Poll conducted 12–18 March 2026 among 1,242 respondents (margin of error $\pm 3.4\%$); primary vote: ALP 37%, One Nation 23%, Liberal Party 17%.

⁶CBC News, “Pierre Poilievre Wins Conservative Leadership Race,” September 10, 2022, <https://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/conservative-leadership-election-results-1.6578329>

⁷Its highest share since the party’s founding in 2003.

⁸Hanspeter Kriesi, “The Rise of Populism and the New Cleavage,” *West European Politics* (published online 11 December 2025): 1–34, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01402382.2025.2591874>

⁹Manhattan Institute, “The New GOP: Survey Analysis of Americans Overall, Today’s Republican Coalition, and the Minorities of MAGA,” 2025, <https://manhattan.institute/article/the-new-gop-survey-analysis-of-americans-overall-todays-republican-coalition-and-the-minorities-of-maga>



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