



BRIEFING

REBUILDING CONSTITUTIONAL STANDARDS: FIVE QUESTIONS FOR THE NEXT CONSERVATIVE LEADER

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Summary

This briefing sets out five key questions which Conservative MPs and others are encouraged to ask the party leadership candidates, based on recent public, parliamentary and expert concerns:

1. Will you commit to strengthening the standards system?
2. What will you do to rebuild political trust and confidence?
3. How will you defend the rule of law?
4. Will you abide by long-established constitutional norms?
5. Will you robustly defend our core political institutions and checks and balances?

Over the past few years, there has been a growing concern about the maintenance of various constitutional standards, which in recent days have reached fever pitch. These were echoed repeatedly in ministerial resignation statements and calls for him to go. Recent opinion polls meanwhile show strong public support for constitutional standards of integrity and accountability.

- The 2019 [Conservative Party manifesto](#) said that the UK has a "strong and resilient democracy" and that the government is "committed to supporting the judiciary in trying to do their jobs, and Johnson [was among those](#) who have been accused of undermining the judiciary".
- Key ministers failed to defend the judiciary robustly against media attack, when judges were [called enemies of the people](#) and the government [echoed that same rhetoric](#).
- The government's [policy of judicial independence](#) is being undermined by [left-wing lawyers](#) and [remainer civil servants](#).

A healthy democracy depends on checks and balances, and crucially on public support for core constitutional bodies such as parliament and the courts. Candidates should be pressed on whether they will defend these principles, and insist on an end to such denigratory rhetoric.

CONCLUSION

The UK has long been a stable democracy, respected by numerous other countries around the world. That reputation has recently been badly tarnished. Meanwhile, experience in other countries such as the US has illustrated how easily constitutional norms and institutions can be weakened, and how vulnerable seemingly stable democracies can be. There are increasing international concerns about the phenomenon of [democratic backsliding](#).

The Conservative Party has traditionally been a stern defender of constitutional traditions, of the importance of deference to norms and respect for the core bodies in the constitution. Recent events have brought that into question, and the current leadership contest offers an important opportunity for the party to reassert these essential values.

About the authors

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