

**Welcome to the second edition of Weber Shandwick's monthly political newsletter. Today, we dive into the whirlwind of conference season, including the surprising optimism of the SNP's gathering and the Conservative leadership race hotting up. We also take a look at Idris Elba's campaign against knife crime, the value of COP29, and Labour's bid to clean up our water.**

If you're wondering how your organisation can adapt to a new Government with a different set of policy priorities and stakeholders, get in touch with us [here](#). There's a real opportunity for forward-thinking businesses to get ahead in this "change" moment, and we're experts in creative campaigning and navigating political processes.

# THE POLITICAL FORECAST

## THE PARLIAMENTARY PULSE: CONFERENCE CHAOS!

Throughout September and October, political conferences are taking place up and down the country. Here's what to watch out for:

### LABOUR IN LIVERPOOL

Starmer is back up north, but this time as Prime Minister! While there will be celebrations following the landslide victory (though we wonder if "Things Will Only Get Better" will still hit the same note at conference karaoke) there are also prickly issues on the agenda. These include the recent axing of the Winter Fuel Allowance for many pensioners and the looming anxiety over the "painful" October Budget.



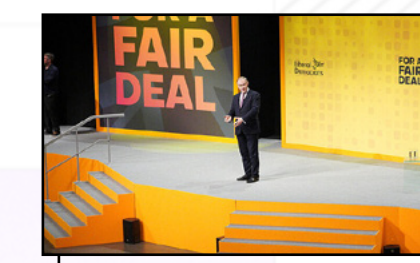
### CONSERVATIVES IN COMPETITION

The first conference after a party loses power is usually a sombre affair. However, this year's Birmingham gathering will be energised by a lively party leadership race. With four contenders remaining, we're expecting a battleground of ideas, rhetoric and endorsements. Sunak and the Shadow Cabinet are likely to be sidelined as the LOTO hopefuls take centre stage...



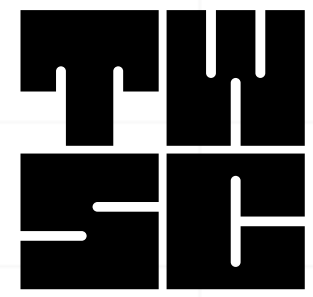
### LIBERAL DEMOCRATS: STUNTS ON THE SEAFRONT?

The Lib Dems are heading back to Brighton for their annual conference, and it might be a tight squeeze; Sir Ed Davey's party secured 72 seats in the recent election, their best result ever. Buoyed by this success, delegates will be defining their strategy for this parliament - but can they translate their headline-grabbing campaign into meaningful action?



### SNP RESET

Taking place a few weeks ago, everything seemed to indicate John Swinney would be facing a downbeat conference. Yet attendees showed a surprising sense of optimism, and determination to reset amidst a backdrop of declining popularity and a pitiful General Election performance. Concerns around the current financial situation were front and centre in all speeches, noting a need for pragmatic cuts and tough spending decisions.



## QUOTE OF THE MONTH

**“I would really like to have a chance to do something. I mean, I can do talking, I can do holding people to account, I can do that and I’ll do it well. But I would like to do something. I’d like to have the experience of being a minister”**

PLZ

PLZ

- **Emily Thornberry MP**, after being controversially snubbed for a cabinet role by PM Starmer. She is now Chair of the Foreign Affairs Committee (and very pleased about it).

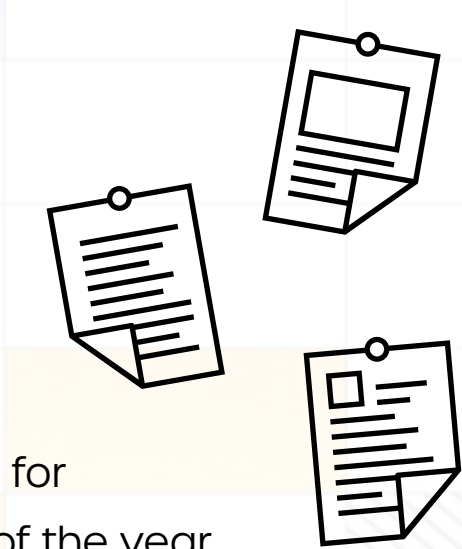
## BUSINESS BULLETIN

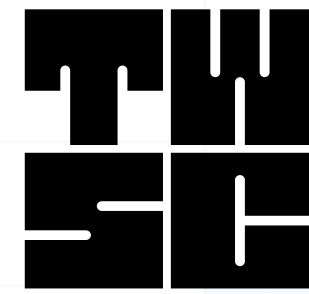
The **Elba Hope Foundation**, launched by Idris Elba in collaboration with the Coalition to Tackle Knife Crime, is rallying campaign groups, affected families, young people, private sector companies (from tech, to sport, to law enforcement) and community leaders to fight knife crime in the UK. Its mission is to uncover the root causes of youth violence, provide evidence to shape policy, and ensure government accountability.

In January, Elba participated in a protest at Parliament Square where clothes were displayed to symbolise lives lost to knife violence, demanding an immediate ban on “Zombie knives” and machetes. In July, Elba and King Charles held a mini-summit at St James’s Palace, where they listened to young people sharing their own experiences.

In response, the Government is introducing legislation to ban ninja swords and tighten regulations on online knife sales. Commander Stephen Clayman, the National Policing lead for knife crime, is also leading a rapid review to evaluate how knives are sold online and propose solutions. He is expected to present his findings to the Home Secretary by the end of the year.

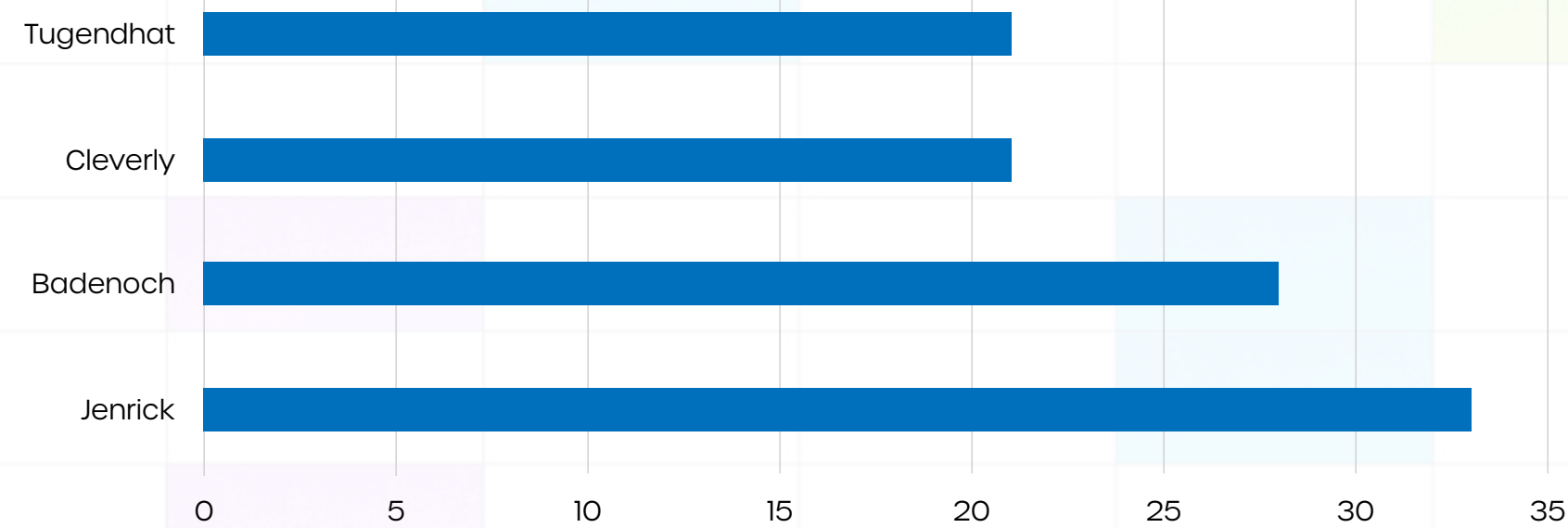
The Foundation’s success is a great example of mobilising a broad coalition and leveraging high-profile endorsements to seek solutions for a complex social issue.





# POLITICS IN NUMBERS

**Conservative Party Leadership race:**  
Number of votes received from Conservative MPs

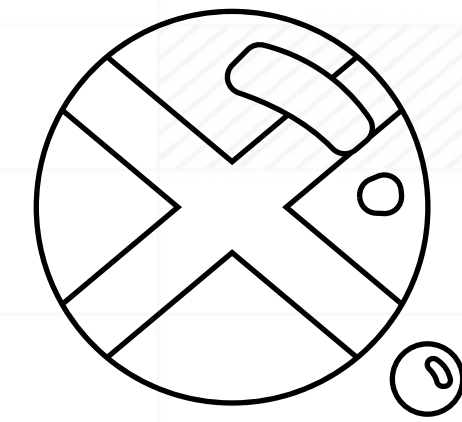


While Jenrick is leading the pack in terms of MP votes, just 20% of the public think that he would make a better PM than Keir Starmer. Out of the four hopefuls, Cleverly is marginally preferred by the public for the PM gig, with 23% saying he would outperform Starmer. However, we do query the value of this polling: at the end of the day, this is a competition of who will be the best Leader of the Opposition and get the Conservatives back on track. And is that not a very different challenge to being Prime Minister..?

# BEYOND THE BUBBLE

First Minister of Scotland John Swinney delivered his first Programme for Government (PFG) at the SNP conference, ***Serving Scotland***. As widely trailed, the programme was shorter than those of previous years and tightly focused on his four priority policy areas. It comes after the Party lost 38 MPs at the General Election, so it was no surprise Swinney chose to stick to familiar territory as eyes turn to the 2026 election.

The wellbeing economy, child poverty and the energy transition were front and centre of the programme, but his announcements sit against a bleak fiscal backdrop. A recent statement from Finance Secretary Shona Robison saw £500m of cuts, alongside departmental budget cuts of £188m.



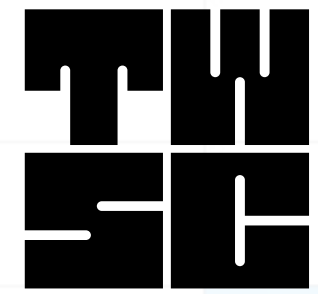
# MAKING A SPLASH

## COP: BOP OR FLOP?

It's the question on every climate-conscious politico's lips: how seriously is the new Labour Government taking November's COP29? On the one hand, it's an early opportunity for Starmer and Miliband to showcase their ambitions for the UK's global climate leadership and GB Energy model. But the controversy of Azerbaijan as a host country (including alleged media intimidation and greenwashing) has put something of a dampener on the event.

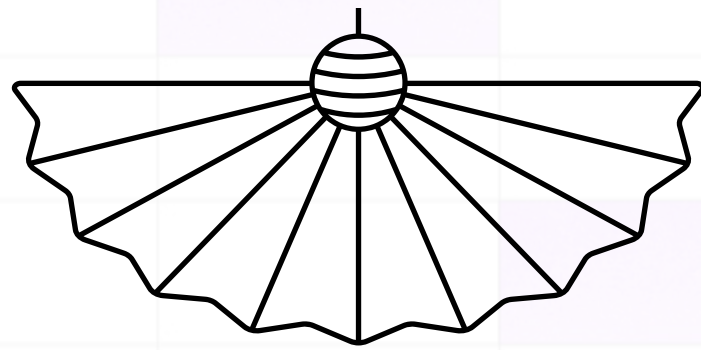


Westminster insiders are now hinting that while Kerry McCarthy will be leading international negotiations in Baku, Ed and Keir will be attending as *"figureheads"* and keeping their powder dry for COP30 in Brazil next year instead. In fact, Ed was over in Brazil just a fortnight ago, strengthening relations ahead of its G20 presidency. So, for those mulling whether to attend the summit this year, we'd probably recommend holding off for 12 months...



## VIRAL VIEW

Deputy Prime Minister Angela Rayner made quite the splash this summer after going viral, dancing behind the decks in Ibiza with DJ Fisher. A video of her grooving alongside TV star Denise van Outen lit up social media, sparking both cheers and criticism. But hey, let's not forget that dancefloor diplomacy knows no party lines – who could forget Michael Gove's infamous Aberdeen nightclub shuffle back in 2021?

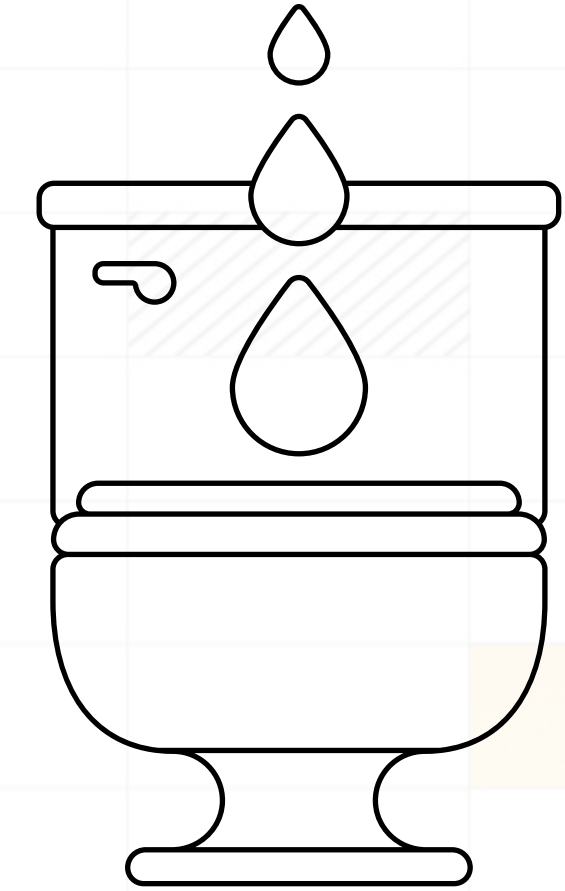


## BEHIND THE BILL

Environment Secretary Steve Reed took a dive right into the UK's literally murky waters, laying out the Government's plan to tackle pollution and reform the UK's failing water infrastructure. The introduction of the Water (Special Measures) Bill grants regulators a wave of tougher enforcement powers to hold water companies accountable for pollution, with penalties including fines and imprisonment – all in the hope of flushing out bad practices.

Reed highlighted years of underinvestment and corporate bonuses as key issues, promising new reservoirs, real-time sewage monitoring, and consumer panels to boost accountability. Reed even evoked Victorian engineers' efforts to clean up water systems, framing the Bill as a modern solution to restore pride in the nation's waterways.

This is a make or break bill for Reed's reputation. His expertise and commitment to improving the UK's water was a big part of how he landed this SoS gig, despite initial Labour party and wider industry concerns that he lacked experience in the brief.



## GET IN TOUCH

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