

The New Prime Minister: Boris Johnson



Introduction

The Result

After a gruelling two-month contest, which featured sixteen public hustings, four televised debates and - at one stage - thirteen candidates, the 160,000 strong membership of the Conservative Party has selected the next Prime Minister. On Tuesday morning, Boris Johnson, the bookies' favourite and frontrunner throughout the contest, was announced as the victor with 66% of the vote to Jeremy Hunt's 34%.

What will a Johnson premiership feel like?

Johnson's premiership will provide an immediate and clear contrast to his predecessor, and not just from a viewpoint of styles of communication.

May's premiership was characterised by her central control of almost all departments of Government, with virtually none of her Cabinet colleagues trusted with their own briefs. It is widely thought that, due to his lack of interest in intricate policy detail, Johnson will allow members of Cabinet greater ownership and responsibility. It should also be acknowledged that, as Mayor of London, Johnson placed a great deal of trust in his deputy mayors who were actually often more responsible for any policy successes than he was.

Speculation will now turn to Johnson's Cabinet, with rumours that either Sajid Javid or Liz Truss is being lined up as Chancellor and of a possible return for Iain Duncan-Smith.



About the new PM

Early Life

Born in New York in 1964, Boris Johnson's childhood included spells across the United States and Europe. Educated at Eton and Balliol College, Oxford (where he was elected President of the Oxford Union), Johnson graduated with an upper-second class degree in Classics.

Journalism

Prior to entering politics, Johnson worked as a journalist with various major newspapers, notably this included a spell as the Daily Telegraph's Brussels Correspondent. He was elected MP for Henley in 2001 and continued as editor of the Spectator until 2005. Since resigning as Foreign Secretary in 2018, he has continued his column in the Daily Telegraph where he has often put forward his opposition to the Government's handling of Brexit.

Mayor of London

Johnson was re-elected as Mayor of London in 2012, overseeing the delivery of the Olympic games in 2012, with cutting crime and boosting jobs his main focuses as Mayor. He built a reputation as a liberal conservative and a real ambassador and champion of the city, and pushed through high profile changes, including a major house building initiative. He also championed a number of failed large infrastructure projects, including the Garden Bridge and a new airport in the Thames Estuary, dubbed "Boris Island".



About the new PM

Brexit Campaign

Johnson was a key player in the Vote Leave campaign and has come under fire for the famous “£350m a week” bus slogan. Following the referendum result and David Cameron’s resignation in 2016, Johnson was set to announce his own leadership bid. This was quickly abandoned following Michael Gove’s decision to withdraw his support for Johnson and stand for the leadership himself.

Foreign Secretary

His time as Foreign Secretary is often cited as another example of his more hands-off approach in leadership positions. His major achievements included the international agreement to expel a record number of Russian diplomats from countries across the globe following the poisoning of Sergei and Yulia Skripal in 2018. Notably, his time at the Foreign Office also saw major controversy regarding his comments the British citizen imprisoned in Iran, Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe, who Johnson incorrectly stated was “simply teaching people journalism”. Comments which were used by the Iranian regime to justify her sentencing.



Brexit

- As the most high-profile Brexiteer in the Conservative Party, Johnson's resignation as Foreign Secretary over the Chequers deal came as no surprise. Following his resignation, he has been a major critic of May's deal and voted against it all but once. He has been particularly critical of the backstop, calling it "effectively defunct"..
- Johnson has described the issues with the backstop as "fundamental" and has stated that an EU concession of a time-limit or unilateral exit mechanism would not be sufficient.
- If Johnson's alternatives to the backstop fail, he has stated that he would seek to leave the EU on 31st October, regardless of whether or not a deal has been secured. He has recently insisted that the UK would be able to continue to trade with the EU without tariff's under the WTO's GATT 24 rules.
- Johnson's views on Brexit seem to have hardened throughout the leadership contest, and he has not ruled out proroguing parliament in a bid to push through no-deal. This has, however, been criticised by many Conservative MPs, with MPs rebelling to defeat the Government in a vote to add an amendment designed to block the new Prime Minister's efforts to prorogue Parliament.



Headline Pledges

Tax

- Increase the threshold for the higher rate of income tax to £80,000 from the current £50,000.
- Indication that the point at which workers start paying income tax will be raised.
- A review of “unhealthy food taxes” such as the so-called sugar tax on soft drinks will take place.

Spending

- Indication that public sector workers will see pay increases and that there will be a rise to the National Living Wage.
- 20,000 extra police officers will be recruited by 2022.
- The Government’s current commitment to spend 0.7% on foreign aid will be protected.

Education

- Will raise per-pupil spending in both primary and secondary schools, with a minimum of £5,000 for each student at primary level.
- Indication that the interest rate on student debts will be lowered.



Tech

- Whilst Boris Johnson has focused on technology as one of his three main priority areas throughout the leadership campaign, little detail has emerged as to his wider approach towards the sector.
- He has, however, committed to rolling out full fibre broadband by 2025, 8 years ahead of the current Government target.
- Looking into his record on technology issues, Johnson has not made any public comments on the two hot topics of the day: the Online Harms White Paper and Huawei's involvement in the UK's 5G infrastructure.

Health

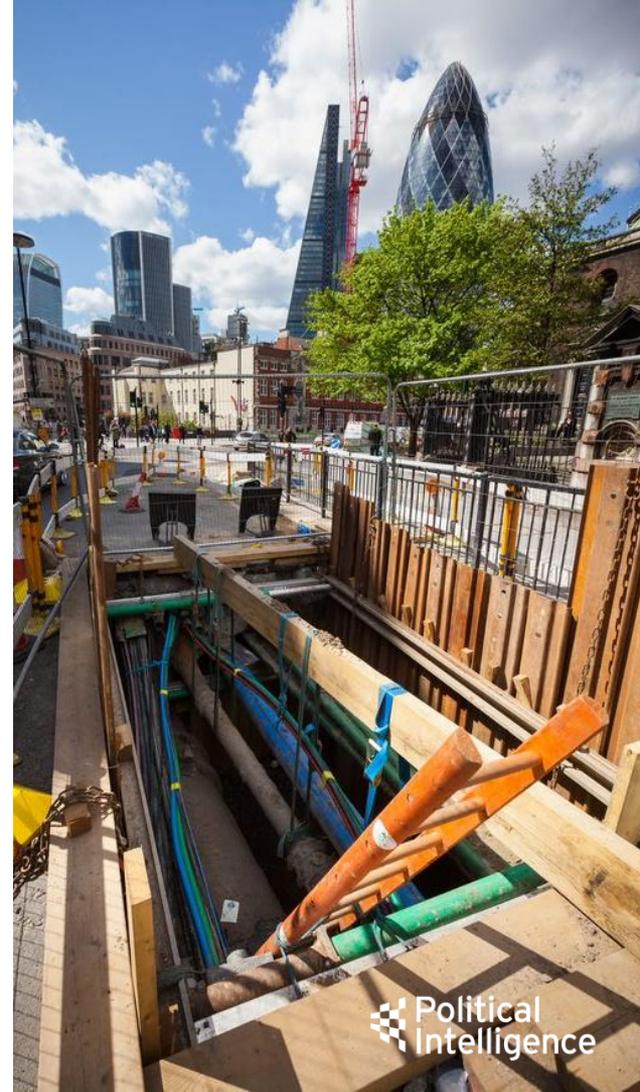
While health has not been a priority sector for Johnson in the past weeks, he has made comments and policy pledges during the campaign that give a greater insight into his aims, which have a focus on prevention:

- Johnson was overheard suggesting that the NHS was not receiving the kind of “changes and management that its needs”, suggesting that both more money and reform were needed.
- He suggested that the effectiveness of ‘sin taxes’ on sugary drinks needs to be reviewed. The timing of Johnson’s remark is no doubt inconvenient for the Government, which has just released their Prevention Green Paper. Reports suggest that Theresa May was keen to release the Paper before Johnson took office as it includes proposals he is expected to oppose, including an ambition for the UK to be smoke-free by 2030 and an extension of the sugar tax.
- He has pledged to offer preferential tax treatment to companies that give their employees counselling and mental health support, with any loss in revenue to be made up by gains in productivity.
- He has also promised to address the £1.1 million cap on NHS pension pots, stating that he had repeatedly tried to persuade Chancellor Philip Hammond to address the issue.



Energy & Transport

- Johnson is expected to launch an independent review of HS2 and ask Douglas Oakervee, ex-Chairman of HS2, to assess the business case of the project and to think about whether and how best to proceed. He has suggested that spending could be prioritised for the northern leg of HS2 and the 'Northern Powerhouse Rail' scheme between Leeds and Manchester (HS3).
- He has been noticeably quieter on the expansion of Heathrow airport – a cause that he has historically opposed and even going as far as previously saying that he would lie down in front of bulldozers to stop the expansion going ahead.
- He has hinted that he would be happy to increase borrowing to fund 'great infrastructure projects'.
- Johnson has pledged to become a 'global decarbonisation leader' and supports legislation for net zero emissions by 2050. He also wants to host the next UN Climate Change Conference in November 2020.



About us

Political Intelligence

For further information on the new administration or if you would like to discuss your current plans for this Parliament and the ways in which Political Intelligence could support your organisation's public affairs activity, please get in touch:

Nick Lansman, Group Managing Director

nick@political-intelligence.com

020 3397 3300

