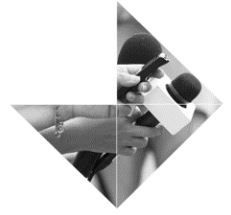


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GENERAL ELECTION 2019

BORIS GETS HIS MAJORITY



By Will Walden, Edelman's Chief Counsel for strategic communications and Boris Johnson's former Press Secretary and Communications Director. Will was Senior Counsel on Johnson's leadership campaign this summer and ran the Prime Minister's transition team at Downing Street, before returning to Edelman in the Autumn.

It is a victory that is nothing short of remarkable. It will reshape British politics for a generation. And for Boris Johnson, a man who has spent much of his adult life preparing for this moment, it is a stunning validation. And yet if you asked him this morning for a detailed five-year plan, clarity on his ideology, or a discernible strategy, he'd probably struggle.

That is not to say Johnson stands for nothing. He's a believer in the power of wealth creators to do good; to help change society for the better; to level-up opportunity. But Johnson is almost unique in British political life precisely because he's a leader who isn't driven by ideology. Neither is he a strategist, or a nuts and bolts guy.

Rather he possesses a broad over-arching vision, emotes the self-confidence to communicate that direction (whilst others produce), and relies on an unrivalled political instinct.

Johnson won for three reasons. First up he was lucky in that his Labour opponent was not just poor but truly terrible. Second, he had one brilliant and very simple discernible message - "Get Brexit Done" - at a moment in time when jaded voters, leave and remain, wanted just that. And finally, he successfully and emphatically cultivated the belief that austerity, and nine years of Tory rule, wasn't anything to do with him.

Voters across the Midlands and Northern England, in constituencies like Blyth Valley, Bishop Auckland, Grimsby and Workington, who've never ever voted anything but

WHAT HAPPENED

- The Conservatives have won their biggest majority since the 1980s
- It comes thanks to winning seats that have been Labour for generations
- The SNP have won overwhelming in Scotland

WHAT NEXT

- MPs will return to Parliament on Tuesday December 17th, with the Withdrawal Agreement being introduced that week
- The UK is due to leave the EU on 31st January
- A Queen's speech will be delivered on December 19th, setting out the Government's forthcoming legislation programme.
- The light detail included in the Conservative manifesto means much of the domestic agenda as well as

Labour, suddenly found themselves saying “I’m voting for Boris”. Not you will note “I’m voting Tory”. In effect this election was decided by what voters *believe* Boris Johnson is offering them, rather than what they *think* he is, or he isn’t.

What he is, is intuitive. He’s a direction setter. He is the Chairman of the board rather than the CEO. What he isn’t is a buffoon. The clowning nonsense deliberately masks extraordinary political foresight.

Johnson’s conservatism is all about the moment at hand. The opportunity. He’s a man who has ridden the wave of populism but who isn’t in fact populist. He’s tacked right on issues like crime and immigration, whilst simultaneously promising very un-Tory like spending on health, education and infrastructure. He is of course massively pro-immigration; you can’t be elected Mayor of Western Europe’s most diverse city twice by being anything other than pro-immigration. He understands the necessity and the economic benefit of immigration. His argument has always been about having control of the numbers, not the numbers themselves.

Socially liberal by instinct, southern and metropolitan in outlook, and yet Johnson’s brand appeals it would seem both to previously disenfranchised working-class voters in the Midlands and the North, and to aspirant middle Britain.

Johnson is socially liberal in part because he hates being told what to do. His attachment to free speech for example is partly the professional bias of the journalist in him, and partly a specific case of what he sees as the fussing and bullying of the nanny state. He hates being told what language to use and, while he struggles manfully to avoid being politically incorrect, he finds it painfully hard to come up with what he sees as the pious platitudes expected of centrist politicians. This will handicap him in his role as a unifier.

If you were hoping a Johnson victory would bring us the detail that underpins his post-Brexit-Britain, you’ll have to wait. Few if anyone, least of all Johnson, could yet describe the framework that will underpin our future trade relationship with the EU; the shape of UK monetary policy in the years ahead; or what tax competitiveness in the wake of Brexit might look like.

future relationship with the EU is still to be decided

- Jeremy Corbyn has said he will stand down before the next election, and there is huge pressure to go quickly
- The Lib Dems have lost their leader and, having supported this election and lost seats, have as much soul searching to do as Labour

KEY WINS AND LOSSES

- The Conservatives have taken iconic industrial heartland seats including Sedgefield, Bolsover and Redcar
- Former No.10 advisors who can be expected to be promoted quickly include Danny Kruger, Andrew Griffith and James Wild
- Environment Minister Zac Goldsmith lost in Richmond Park
- Labour’s shadow cabinet losses are limited, but include Sue Hayman, Shadow Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, and Laura Pidcock, Shadow Secretary of State for Employment Rights and tipped as a potential future leader of the Labour Party
- Jo Swinson lost her seat to the SNP

That's partly about how he operates, and it's also partly about the unanswered questions. How for example does Johnson deliver on his raft of spending promises (without rises in personal taxation) whilst re-balancing an economy post Brexit that is forecast to grow by just 1% in 2020.

We know Johnson has promised a tax cutting budget by the end of February. More significantly the government is required by law to outline to Parliament its trade negotiating position with the EU within 30 days of the Withdrawal Agreement being ratified. In other words, pretty soon.

Johnson was once famously but selectively quoted as saying "F*** business". What he actually wants is for business to step up, to embrace Brexit, and to help. Johnson craves ideas in this space, business will be falling over itself this morning to fill the void, given the emphatic nature of his victory.

So, when you ask him what a low tax, regulation light, economic vision for the country looks like he will probably first tell you "Get Brexit Done." That's now nailed on.

After that it's all about painting a picture - certainty, aspiration, enterprise, and levelling up the rest of the UK outside of London. Science, R&D, infrastructure investment, education and skills, housing, and towns.

Johnson paints in broad brush strokes. Others colour in the detail that will get you there. Johnson governs by listening, weighing up, and then deciding. Others enact.

If you want to understand how he'll govern, his economic vision, and how he sees his relationship with business, then look no further than how he ran London post the 2008 financial crash.

Tube upgrades; new cleaner greener buses; the London living wage; devolution of rail services; an on time on budget Olympics; more affordable housing than his predecessor. All paid for, at least in part, because Johnson's London was open to business, and aggressively pro foreign investment.

Three central pillars will support that vision as PM. The first is the power of education and the opportunity it gives. To Johnson nothing matters more. Education is the key to economic and social empowerment. He championed it as Mayor at home, and as Foreign Secretary – through his access to education for girls' programme - across the globe.

Another is public infrastructure: using the state's resources to leave a long term potentially multi-century legacy. He sees infrastructure investment as the key to levelling up every region of the United Kingdom.

The third is the power of positivity: he will set a positive, upbeat tone because he thinks that, with the right atmosphere, people and businesses get on and achieve things.

Concerns remain of course. The scale of the SNP's victory in Scotland leaves Johnson with an immediate problem - a battle to preserve the Union, and with it the soul of the United Kingdom.

Then there's his bullish approach to striking that free trade deal with the EU before the end of 2020. Johnson has always profoundly believed that the only way to close any deal is to have a hard deadline. That's why until today he would never have countenanced an extension to the Transition Period beyond December 2020.

How different things look this morning. He has a mandate to leave on his terms. That could yet mean ditching the hard-line approach, shedding the Brexiteers and seeking an alignment that's much closer to the EU.

Before today some allies worried that Johnson's Chairman status risked putting too much power in the hands of his de facto deputies - CEO Michael Gove and COO Dominic Cummings. Men who definitely possess ideology.

But the size and scale of his victory give Johnson substantial room for manoeuvre here too, should he choose to exercise it. There will be a minor reshuffle in the coming days. The major reset will come after Brexit, in the Spring.

He'll need a new chief business advisor too. Andrew Griffith - Sky's former COO - was Johnson's one heavyweight private sector poach back in July. Whilst the seat is yet to declare, Griffith is expected to be elected the new MP for the safe Tory seat of Arundel and South Downs. Johnson will need a new bridge to business in the days ahead.

And then there's tone and trust. Will we see a return to the Trumpian rhetoric and the narrow populism that characterised his first few months in office? The jury is out.

Johnson doesn't like being divisive. And he hates being unpopular. Instinctively he will want to reach out, to unify and to heal. To reset the clock. Once again, the size of his majority gives him great licence to roam in this space.

But he has also grown a tougher skin since the 2016 referendum and appears more willing to take risks even at the expense of his own popularity ratings. Victory will undoubtedly embolden those around him, and so far, they have set the strident tone.

Johnson recognised early in his post referendum journey that the political balance in UK politics no longer rests in the middle. He rode the wave. And this morning he won.

It's what comes next, how quickly he can translate his victory and his vision to those around him, and how (or if) they enact that for him, that will ultimately decide where we land.

Most of all, having promised the earth and won big, he will now need to deliver a discernible difference to the lives of those who gave him such a resounding mandate. Those who voted Tory for the very first time. Those who have punched an extraordinary hole through the heart of British politics.