

Polling Matters: The ‘unstoppable’ rise of Boris Johnson?

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Polling Matters is an independent, non-partisan podcast providing expert polling news and analysis, with guests, in the run up to the General Election. In the most recent episode, the team sat down with Tony Travers from the LSE to discuss all things London, including the seats that matter in May, devolution and PR for local Government and who might replace Boris Johnson in 2016. In this post, [Keiran Pedley](#) examines the Mayor’s popularity and what his future may hold.



You can listen to this week’s polling matters podcast [here](#). An associated post from LSE’s Tony Travers can be found [here](#).

In our wide ranging discussion on London during this week’s episode, we discussed Boris Johnson’s polling numbers and examined his future. On face value, the figures are highly impressive. Leaving aside the fact that he has been elected Mayor twice in a ‘Labour city’ (more than half of London parliamentary seats are Labour held) Londoners think he is doing a good job too. In a recent [poll by YouGov](#), 60% of Londoners said he was doing a ‘well’ as Mayor compared to 29% that said he was doing ‘badly’.

He is also very popular among the British public as a whole. A poll conducted by [ComRes of GB adults last summer](#) showed the Mayor as the most popular politician in the country.

Looking beyond the headline figures, a striking finding in this poll was the Mayor’s popularity among UKIP voters – a cohort the Conservative Party badly needs to win back in the future. It showed 47% of UKIP voters as favourable towards Johnson compared with just 17% towards the Prime Minister. Home Secretary Theresa May, a likely rival in a future Conservative leadership race, also polled just 17% among UKIP voters.

All of this is very encouraging for the Mayor’s supporters. Not only is he popular in the country as a whole, but he can credibly argue that the numbers show he is best placed to unite a fractured ‘Conservative family’ in the future. This is a potentially potent argument post defeat if the Conservative Party thinks losing votes to UKIP has cost them the election. Furthermore, it is not inconceivable that as Conservative leader he would face a very unpopular Prime Minister in Ed Miliband leading a weak, multi-party Coalition Government of sorts. Put bluntly, he would fancy his chances in that scenario.

However, supporters of the Mayor should not get ahead of themselves. Johnson faces three key obstacles in his quest for the keys to Number 10. First, as yet there is no vacancy, David Cameron may yet win in May and this would complicate Boris Johnson’s path to the Conservative leadership greatly. Second, Theresa May cannot be ruled out, a poll of [Conservative supporters in December](#) showed that she actually leads Boris Johnson among the grassroots. Thirdly, should Johnson become Conservative leader, he inherits with it the ‘Conservative brand’. This is crucial as it remains to be seen whether his personal popularity would remain strong once he is tied much more directly with the Conservative Party in the eyes of the public.

Nonetheless, the numbers for now are clear, Boris Johnson deserves to be taken seriously as a potential future Conservative leader and Prime Minister. That is, as long as the ball does indeed ‘break from the ruck’, as Johnson himself once said. While a number of scenarios are possible, Prime Minister ‘Boris’ is certainly one of them.

About the Author

Keiran Pedley is an Associate Director at GfK NOP and presenter of the podcast *'Polling Matters'*.
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