

The results

Boris Johnson's gamble has paid off. He will return to Parliament with a majority of roughly eighty MPs having taken swathes of seats from the Labour Party. The UK will formally leave the European Union within the next two months and a further general election looks highly unlikely before 2024.

Projected final result:

Conservatives	Labour	Liberal Democrats	SNP	Others
				
365	203	11	48	23

The electoral map has been redrawn. Traditional Labour seats like Workington, Darlington, Blythe and Leigh have turned blue. Even places like Redcar (which recently saw its steel works shut down) and Sedgefield (once held by Tony Blair) were taken by the Conservatives. The Midlands followed the same trend with long-standing Labour MPs such as Dennis Skinner losing Bolsover after forty-four years. London remains an outlier, with Labour and the Liberal Democrats making some gains. However, there were seats where a split in the remain vote allowed the Conservatives to win, such as the marginal constituencies of Kensington and the City of London and Westminster.

Jeremy Corbyn's overnight statement was short on remorse. He blamed the media and Brexit for his party's result whilst arguing that his policies remain popular. Corbyn also announced that he will not stand in a further election but pledged to stay on whilst the party reflected on the reasons for their losses. The general expectation is that his MPs will move to remove him from power sooner rather than later, but despite suffering what could yet be the worst Labour result since 1935, the left of the party retain control of the party's structures. Corbyn's legacy therefore looks set to continue for the short-medium term.

For the Liberal Democrats, the election was particularly disappointing. Despite picking up the odd seat such as Richmond Park, they also lost seats, including that of their leader, Jo Swinson, who was defeated by less than a hundred and fifty votes. All this means expected changes to the party leadership of both the Liberal Democrats and Labour over the coming months.

The Union

In the devolved nations, the picture has been mixed. The Conservatives had strong results in Wales, but the SNP has increased its share of the vote to record their best result since the 2015 General Election – taking just shy of fifty seats at the expense of the unionist parties. Meanwhile, in Northern Ireland, defeats for the DUP (most notably their leader Nigel Dodds) mean that for the first time in history unionist representation is in a minority. The SNP's success and the DUP's failure will undoubtedly increase pressure on the union. The SNP will claim a clear mandate for a new independence referendum and will formally request a Section 30 Order to begin that process before Christmas. While this may not be forthcoming from Boris Johnson in the short term, pressure will grow if the SNP win the next Holyrood elections in 2021.

A Johnson majority government

Johnson is in a position of great power. He has been the focus of the election, relied on only a handful of colleagues to front the campaign, and runs a tight unit of trusted advisors in No 10. Many of Johnson's greatest critics in his own party have left Parliament and been replaced by around a hundred new MPs who owe much to him. The size of his majority also means that he no longer needs to negotiate with the hardliner Eurosceptics in his own party or the DUP.

The new intake of Conservative MPs will also change the makeup of the Conservative Parliamentary Party, whilst the new geographies represented by the Tories will mean new constituency-specific pressures on the party's policy platform. Conservative strategists will already be looking at how to retain their gains in 2024.

The policy-thin manifesto on which Johnson stood provides him some flexibility to chart his own course. However, it also provides the opportunity for the House of Lords, where the Conservatives are in a minority, to be more robust in challenging legislation. The question many are asking of this new era of Johnson's premiership is will he be a radical or One Nation Prime Minister?

What happens next?

Over the weekend, Johnson will appoint his Ministers. A reshuffle is possible but might wait until the New Year when mooted plans to merge government departments could take place. Parliament will then return on Tuesday and new MPs will be sworn in.

The Queen's Speech is expected next week and will provide a clearer indication of the Conservatives' legislative programme in the coming year. Although much of this legislation will be Brexit-related, we can expect the Conservatives to introduce legislation on housing and an Environment Bill ahead of the COP 26 UN Climate Change Conference in Glasgow in November. January will be dominated by passing Brexit legislation, but February will likely see a Budget at which we can expect to see significant investment in the NHS, police and infrastructure spending – particularly on science, innovation and R&D.

Despite Johnson's promise to "get Brexit done", trade deal negotiations will begin in earnest in the coming months. The size of his majority removes some of the pressure to do a trade deal with the European Union by the end of the transition period in December 2020. However, if he wants longer to negotiate, he will have to request an extension of the transition by June. Most of those who know Johnson, suggest that he will seek a free trade deal which allows regulatory divergence from the European Union but with so many new MPs, it is too early to judge how loyal his backbenchers will be during trade talks.

Whatever route Johnson chooses, he wakes up this morning as the most powerful Prime Minister since Tony Blair.

Timeline

December 2019

13th: Ministers appointed

17th: Parliament returns, MPs are sworn in

19th: Queen's speech (expected)

23rd: First Reading of EU Withdrawal Bill (expected)

23rd: House Rises

January 2020

6th: MPs return from Winter Recess

W/C 6th: Second Reading of EU Withdrawal Agreement (expected)

Before 31st: EU Withdrawal Bill approved, UK leaves the EU (expected)

February 2020

W/C 3rd: Budget (expected)

Planning for a new Parliament? Want to understand what the results mean for your business? Get in touch.

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