

What will bring Johnson down?

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Boris Johnson took to joking recently that he might be prime minister for decades. His deliberate actions to undermine the democratic process suggest that this was not quite the joke he suggested. The reality is, however, different. When his own backbenchers are now openly undermining him in newspapers like The Sun his days are numbered. That he did lose last week also suggests that democracy's day is not quite done, yet. But what is it that will bring him down?

It will not be the Owen Paterson affair.

It may not be the Downing Street flat, although that stench of corruption and naive stupidity around this will not help him.

Instead I think it will be Brexit. The government is threatening Article 16 notice with regard to Northern Ireland. There is, however, no justification for that. The EU has already massively compromised on this issue. The simple reality is that Johnson signed a deal that he refused to believe said what it did. And as a consequence the EU will be entitled to take substantial retaliatory measures. In effect they might say that Brexit is back on the table, and that the deal was not done.

It is entirely possible that 2022 might be a year to renegotiate the whole Brexit deal, not just the Northern Ireland protocol. If that happens, and it seems possible, the weariness with this will be overwhelming. There will be a reaction.

First, most people will be angry that despite his claims Johnson did not get Brexit done. The backlash against his deeply flawed, over ready deal will be swift and strong. I suspect he will be unseated as a result.

Second, Labour might take the opportunity to move into Brexit opposition. I can't see them arguing for return. But support for a much closer relationship with strong regulatory alignment would be likely.

Third, the public will not want all this for the sake of Northern Ireland. Their indifference to it may be wrong, but the reality is that they are. The popularity of a government

elected yo get nine thing done, on which it failed, will be real.

There always have to be tipping points. Johnson has not got to his yet. But I have a feeling it will not be long before he does.

But who comes after that? There may be an election. More likely there would be a lame duck Tory who would be unlikely to emulate John Major and retain power. But which of the non-entities in or out of Cabinet that might be is anyone's guess.