

## The Tories: what next?

Published: January 13, 2026, 12:02 pm

---

*I have [posted this thread to Twitter](#) this morning:*

---

There is an old truism that suggests that the Leader of the Conservatives always enjoys the total support of their party until, that is, the day that they do not. So the question is, has that day arrived for Johnson? A thread....

Yesterday was a miserable day for Johnson. William Wragg laid into him from the Tory centre in the Commons. Steve Baker did so from the Tory right, with likely greater political consequence. Only Danny Kruger and Michael Ellis would defend him. The remaining Tories fled.

Labour won the day. Johnson has been referred to the Standards Committee. As Channel 4 pointed out, the allegation is that he lied about Covid parties when it is already the case that more Covid fixed penalty notices have been issued for activity at No. 10 than anywhere else.

There is not a single person who seriously believes Johnson did not lie. And if and when the Met Police ever choose to do the job required of them and conclude their enquiries into some of the simplest cases they might ever have been asked to investigate there will be more fines.

There could, in fact, be more than that. The only plausible explanation for police delay is that the Crown Prosecution Service is deciding whether there should be a court case brought against Johnson for serial Covid offences, and running the establishment where so many occurred.

Is such a court prosecution possible? We know the CPS is involved. We know that the intention within the Covid regulations was that more serious cases should result in a court trial. Serial offences must make the possibility of Johnson facing that trial a very real one.

Even if he avoids that outcome, and he might, multiple admitted offences will mean the case against Johnson will be overwhelming. Politically, I think yesterday was the day when the Tories admitted that.

The likelihood that the local elections will now be a massive opinion poll rather than an exercise in local democracy does appear to be high, which is to be regretted at one level, and is welcome for the likelihood that this will seal his fate, I suspect.

If 54 Tory MPs have not submitted no confidence letters to the 1922 Committee by May 5 (and after Steve Baker's intervention I think it likely they will have done) then by May 6 they will.

The likelihood that Johnson will be PM when the Standards Committee get to consider the lies he has told is low, in my opinion. That also happens to increase the likelihood of a serious penalty from them, probably involving exclusion from the House for more than ten days.

That in turn then leads to the possibility, and even likelihood, of a recall petition on Johnson in his constituency. If that happens I am certain the 7,000 or so signatures required to make it happen will be secured. I expect Johnson to be gone as an MP in that case, this year.

I am now so confident of this let's move on. What then? The only consequence is that the Tories will need a new leader. Raab will, presumably act in the interim. He should enjoy the moment but pray it does not last long. He must be aware he has none of the skills required.

Nor has anyone else now in Cabinet. They were either chosen for their incompetence, or have demonstrated it. Others, like Sunak, Javid and Zahawi have ruled themselves out through their financial dealings. And then there is Truss.

It is not by chance that there are so few clips of Truss available on YouTube. She is kept away from video cameras because she is so hopeless. The few clips there are include her classic speeches on cheese and pork.

No one wanting to caricature an incompetent politician could have come up with something like those appalling speeches. The Tories already know she would be an electoral disaster. I really cannot see her winning support from MPs.

So who might? The far-right can't take this. Steve Baker might be a kingmaker, but he cannot claim the Crown. I think he knows it. There is no one else there.

So, the Tories have to pick from outside the existing Cabinet, and not from the far right. That leaves Tom Tugendhat and Jeremy Hunt. The former is virtually unknown, having risen only to be a Commons Committee chair. Hunt lost to Johnson.

Hunt has to be front runner, but so too was Sunak recently. These things can change, but I happen to think the Tory instinct for power now comes into play. With Johnson ruined, and his policies with him, the MPs will want six things.

First, many of them will want preferment and much of Johnson's Cabinet is ripe to be culled, from Rees-Mogg onwards. Hunt may be willing to offer many the Right Honourable tag they crave as a Cabinet Minister.

Second, they have seen Hunt in front of cameras. I don't like him. But they know he can withstand the heat. That will count very strongly for him.

Third, he knows he can't reverse Brexit, but can try to make it work. That is all the Tories can hope to salvage from its wreckage now. He has more chance of doing that than anyone else now.

Fourth, he is the person Labour least want. As a seemingly reasonable person he can add the stability the Tories crave, at least electorally after Johnson.

Fifth, that I cannot be sure what Hunt stands for helps him. The Tories can project themselves onto him for long enough for him to become Leader.

Sixth, Tugendhat has none of these things going for him. And I cannot see anyone else winning, but I may be wrong of course.

Then what? Expect four things. One will be moderation with the EU. There will be a charm offensive and an offer of cooperation to make it look like Brexit can work without the logjams. That this will neuter the project does not matter. It will be called making Brexit work.

There will be full cooperation with Ireland as a result. For the sake of peace that will matter.

At the Treasury, Sunak will be long gone. The spending tap will be opened. Whether wisely or not I do not know, but spending will happen. The Tories will be intent on buying their way back to power.

That will be linked to green issues. The Tories have to buy the young, and they will try to do so.

And Hunt would be ruthless in holding his right-wing at bay. Johnson used expulsions to win power. Hunt could do the same. He will challenge them to bring him down, when they know many will lose their seats if they do.

In other words, he could be a nightmare for Labour. Don't rule the Tories out yet, in other words. There are 2.5 years to a general election as yet. A lot could happen. Including me being wrong and Sunak becoming Leader despite it all. In which case

Labour could laugh their way to victory.

To summarise: Johnson is toast, but to think that means the Tories are necessarily down and out would be far too big an assumption to make. We still live in interesting, and potentially dangerous, times.