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# The Conservative Party Leadership Election of 2019: An Analysis of the Voting Motivations of Conservative Parliamentarians

## Abstract

*This article provides an empirical analysis of the voting behaviour of Conservative parliamentarians in the final parliamentary ballot of the Conservative Party leadership election of 2019. We construct a dataset for the parliamentary Conservative Party and then put forward hypotheses that will consider the possible Eurosceptic, party political, economic and/or ideological motivations for the voting behaviour of Conservative parliamentarians in the final parliamentary ballot. Our findings demonstrate that support for Johnson and Hunt was structured around age and voting behaviour in the European Union (EU) membership referendum, with support for Gove drawn from those who voted for May's Withdrawal Agreement in the first meaningful vote. Other factors, such as the economic impact of Brexit on constituencies and social liberalism, were not found to be statistically significant.*

**Keywords:** Party Leadership Elections, British Conservative Party, British Prime Ministers, Parliamentary Behaviour, Boris Johnson.

## Introduction

When Boris Johnson became Prime Minister in July 2019 he became the fifteenth British Prime Minister since 1945. Seven of his post-war predecessors entered Downing Street by forming an administration after a general election (Clement Attlee, Winston Churchill, Harold Wilson, Edward Heath, Margaret Thatcher, Tony Blair and David Cameron). The other eight became Prime Minister as their party already held office when they acquired the party leadership (Anthony Eden, Harold Macmillan, Alec Douglas-Home, James Callaghan, John Major, Gordon Brown, Theresa May and Johnson). When considering just Conservative Party Prime Ministers, four propelled their parties from opposition and into government, but Johnson was the sixth Conservative Prime Minister who inherited office (Worthy, 2016).

This explains why there is an extensive academic literature on leadership transitions and the history of leadership elections within British political parties (Stark, 1996; Heppell, 2008, 2010; Quinn, 2012; Denham *et al*, 2020). With regard to leadership selection within the Conservative Party most of their leadership elections since 1975 have produced qualitatively-driven accounts on

the candidates and campaigning periods as a means of explaining who won and why (Alderman and Carter, 1991, 2002; Alderman, 1996, 1998; Denham and Dorey, 2006; Quinn, 2019). Alongside these have been quantitatively-driven analyses of Conservative Party leadership elections. When identifying the drivers of voting behaviour amongst Conservative parliamentarians, these studies confirmed the importance of attitudes towards Europe (Cowley and Garry 1998; Cowley and Bailey 2000; Heppell and Hill, 2008, 2010; Jeffery *et al*, 2018).

This article will extend the quantitatively-driven academic literature by offering an appraisal of the Conservative Party leadership election of 2019. It will focus on the eliminative parliamentary ballots stage of the contest, and specifically the final parliamentary ballot, in which Johnson and Jeremy Hunt defeated Michael Gove and proceeded to the second stage of the leadership election: the membership ballot.

What is our rationale for focusing on the parliamentary stage of the leadership election? Some of these earlier quantitative studies which were conducted on previous leadership elections occurred before the establishment of the current Conservative Party leadership election rules. Prior to 1998 the party relied on eliminative parliamentary ballots alone for leadership selection and their leadership ejections were activated by a challenger provision. The current procedures differ as the eviction procedures involve a confidence motion rather than a challenger provision and the election procedures involves two stages – stage one being eliminative parliamentary ballots which whittle down the field of potential leaders to two candidates, and stage two where the final choice is made via a ballot of party members. Academics have debated the significance of this process of democratisation and membership participation upon the type of candidates being nominated and selected and how the dynamics of the campaigning period have been changed (Alderman, 1999) and how it has impacted upon the process of removing the incumbent party leader (Quinn, 2005).

However, although the switch from just parliamentary ballots to parliamentary *and* membership ballots has been described as democratisation, it is better described as *partial* democratisation. This is an appropriate definition for the following reasons. First, it is Conservative parliamentarians who act as gatekeepers: they can screen out candidates that they disapprove of as stage one of the existing rules (the parliamentary stage) and this conditions the options at stage two (the membership stage), which is the one-member-one-vote ballot of Conservative Party members. Second, the eviction procedures themselves also demonstrate the dominance of parliamentarians over members. The confidence motion provision is activated when fifteen percent of Conservative parliamentarians' request a ballot: i.e. they can override the mandate given to the leader by the members. To withstand a confidence motion, the incumbent needs to secure a majority of the votes cast by parliamentarians. If they do, no further confidence

motions can be triggered for twelve months. If the incumbent fails to secure a majority then the party leadership is declared vacant and a new leadership election is initiated. Only two confidence motions have been activated since these procedures were introduced in 1998 – Iain Duncan Smith was removed in late 2003 and May survived in December 2018 (Quinn, 2012: 97-130; Hayton and Heppell, 2010; Roe-Crines *et al*, 2020). These two reasons demonstrate that whilst academics should be incentivised to conduct research on Conservative Party members in relation to leadership selection, it is clear that research on the eliminative parliamentary ballot stage remains critical<sup>1</sup>.

Our paper identifies what variables might be driving the voting behaviour of Conservative parliamentarians in the final parliamentary ballot. Our paper will proceed as follows. The opening section will offer an overview of the candidates before identifying the outcome of the eliminative parliamentary ballots. The following section will outline the hypotheses that we are seeking to test and will explain how we collected the data for our variables. In our final section we will provide our research findings and then in our conclusion we will analyse what this might tell us about the Conservative Party and how it relates to existing academic assumptions about leadership elections.

## **Candidates and Ballots**

The Conservative Party leadership election of 2019 took place following the resignation of May. She had acquired the leadership of the Conservative Party after the EU membership referendum of 2016, with the leave result making the position of the remain-backing prime minister, Cameron, untenable and resulting in his resignation. The Conservative Party leadership election of 2016 only involved a parliamentary stage as the second-placed candidate, Andrea Leadsom, decided to withdraw her candidacy given the scale of the lead that May held over her after the final parliamentary ballot (May had secured 199 votes or 60.3 percent of parliamentarians in the final ballot, as compared to Leadsom, 84 votes and 25.5 percent, and Michael Gove, 46 votes and 14 percent, Quinn, 2019).

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<sup>1</sup> Party leaders with disputed mandates between the parliamentarians and the membership have tended to struggle electorally – e.g. the example of Duncan Smith for the Conservatives and Jeremy Corbyn for Labour (see Hayton and Heppell, 2010; Crines *et al*, 2018). Recent work by Murr (2015) provides evidence of a strong relationship between the party leader with the largest parliamentary mandate and subsequent General Election success, suggesting that members should heed the cue given to them by their parliamentarians.

Her premiership was bedevilled by the challenges associated with implementing Brexit. Part of her difficulties may have stemmed from the lack of faith the leave wing of the parliamentary Conservative Party had in her. She voted remain and the vast bulk of remain Conservative parliamentarians had voted for her in the leadership election, with leave-backing Conservative MPs splintering between Leadsom and Gove (Jeffery *et al*, 2018). She then undermined her own position further by her decision to engineer a general election in 2017 in which her campaigning and communication limitations were exposed. Losing her small parliamentary majority and then only remaining in power thanks to a confidence and supply arrangement with the Democratic Unionist Party served to erode further her political authority (Bale and Webb, 2018).

Disagreements over the government's negotiation position with the EU would lead to a series of ministerial resignations including that of the Foreign Secretary, Boris Johnson, and two Brexit Secretaries, David Davis and Dominic Raab. Thereafter the Withdrawal Agreement that was agreed with the EU was rejected by the House of Commons on three separate occasions, resulting in an extension to the intended date for exiting the EU from the end of March 2019 to the end of October 2019. One of the consequences of this was the need to participate in the May European Parliamentary elections. Here, the Conservatives secured a lamentable 8.8 percent of the vote, finishing in fifth place. They haemorrhaged support to the newly formed Brexit Party, which proposed a hard Brexit based on World Trade Organisation rules, and finished first with 30.5 percent of the vote (Cutts *et al*, 2019). Having already survived a confidence motion in December 2018 by 200 to 117 votes, (see Roe-Crines *et al*, 2020), May could not face another confidence motion until the end of 2019. However, under pressure from the executive of the 1922 backbench committee to stand aside, she voluntarily resigned in early June thus activating the next Conservative Party leadership election.

### *Candidates*

A total of thirteen Conservative parliamentarians indicated their intention to stand. Three of them – James Cleverly, Kit Malthouse and Sam Gyimah – withdrew before the deadline for nominations once it became clear that they would not reach the threshold for participation of eight nominations. Ten Conservative parliamentarians, of varying degrees of public recognition, were then nominated and proceeded to the first ballot. From the Cabinet and the remain wing were Jeremy Hunt (Foreign Secretary); Sajid Javid (Home Secretary); Matt Hancock (Health Secretary) and Rory Stewart (International Development) and they were joined by the fellow remainder and former Chief Whip (Mark Harper). From the Cabinet and the leave wing was Michael Gove

(Environment Secretary). The other four leave candidates had resigned from the Cabinet over Brexit: Johnson (former Foreign Secretary); Leadsom (former Leader of the House of Commons); Raab (former Brexit Secretary); and Esther McVey (former Work and Pensions Secretary).

This constituted the largest field of candidates for the leadership of the Conservative Party since they introduced parliamentary ballots in 1965. Of the previous nine leadership elections they had never had more than five candidates (Denham *et al*, 2020: 5-128). Given the bloated field of candidates the 1922 Committee inserted the following stipulations – to proceed candidates in the first ballot would need to pass the threshold of five percent of the PCP, which equated to seventeen votes; and then for the second ballot candidates would need the backing of ten percent of the PCP or thirty-three votes (Johnston, 2019).

### *Ballots*

A total of five eliminative parliamentary ballots were conducted. The votes cast in each eliminative round are presented in table one. Johnson was placed first in each of the eliminative ballots. He secured over one third of the PCP in the first parliamentary ballot on 36.4 percent— with a 22.7 percent lead over Hunt in second place - and his vote increased with each parliamentary ballot with him reaching a majority within the PCP by the fourth round.

One factor which may have aided Johnson in securing parliamentary endorsements was *some* of the evidence from opinion polling data. We can subdivide the opinion polling evidence into two categories – first, opinion amongst Conservative Party members, and second, opinion amongst the wider electorate.

**Table One: Parliamentary Eliminative Ballots**

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Ballot	First		Second		Third		Fourth		Fifth	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Boris Johnson	114	36.4	126	40.3	143	45.7	157	50.2	160	51.1
Jeremy Hunt	43	13.7	46	14.7	54	17.3	59	18.8	77	24.6
Michael Gove	37	11.8	41	13.1	51	16.3	61	19.5	75	24 *
Dominic Raab	27	8.6	30	9.6	*					
Sajid Javid	23	7.3	33	10.5	38	12.1	34	10.9	*	
Matt Hancock	20	6.4	**							
Rory Stewart	19	6.1	37	11.8	27	8.6	*			
Andrea Leadsom	11	3.5	*							

Mark Harper	10	3.2	*								
Esther McVey	9	2.9	*								
Spoilt Ballots	0	0		0	0	0	0	2	0.6	1	0.3
N	313	100		313	100	313	100	313	100	313	100

\* Automatically eliminated

\*\* Voluntarily withdrew

When considering opinion amongst Conservative Party members Johnson did perform strongly against other Conservative candidates. For example, opinion polling conducted as the parliamentary ballots commenced demonstrated that amongst the membership Johnson had the strongest rating on the question of being a good leader (77 percent) and the lowest rating on the question of being a bad leader (19 percent). The respective good minus bad ratings for all candidates placed Johnson on + 58 as compared to Raab + 47; Javid + 31; Leadsom +21; Hunt +19; McVey +7; Gove +5; Stewart -19; Hancock -19 and Harper -21 (YouGov, 2019a). As the parliamentary ballots progressed opinion polling feedback on whether members would be ‘happy’ or ‘unhappy’ with specific candidates becoming party leader and Prime Minister, the strength of Johnson as a candidate was again demonstrated. If he was selected 71 percent of members would be happy with the outcome, as compared to 41 percent for Hunt and Javid, 33 percent for Gove and 22 percent for Stewart. Conversely, in terms of being unhappy with the outcome on 19 percent would be unhappy if Johnson emerged as their new leader, as compared to Javid 28 percent; Hunt 31 percent, Gove 46 percent and Stewart 62 percent (YouGov 2019a)<sup>2</sup>.

However, although Johnson outperformed his rivals in terms of membership perceptions of competence and acceptability to them, even they identified doubts about his abilities as a unifier and in terms of his electability. For example, on the questions of which candidate would be most effective at broadening the appeal of the Conservatives Johnson (on 60 percent) was outscored by Javid (on 67 percent) (YouGov, 2019a). On the issue of unifying the Conservatives and bringing together those that had originally voted remain and those who voted leave, Johnson had a lead

<sup>2</sup> The opinion of the mass membership could have been an influence upon the voting behaviour of Conservative parliamentarians. As the membership was overwhelmingly pro-Brexit, and they had deduced that Johnson was the candidate most interested in, and capable of, delivering Brexit, some Conservative parliamentarians may have endorsed Johnson to prevent dissatisfaction from their own constituency parties. Therefore, as well as Conservative parliamentarians choosing Johnson as a cue to the membership to do likewise, it is possible that in some cases Conservative parliamentarians were simply responding to the preference of the grassroots for Johnson. For an insight into the views of Conservative party members see Bale et al, 2019.

amongst the candidates who could not unify – 41 percent of members feared he was a divisive figure with only 33 percent saying the same of Hunt and only 28 percent identifying that Javid was a divisive figure (YouGov, 2019a)

When considering opinion amongst the wider electorate the evidence of Johnson being superior to the others was less compelling. Immediately prior to the onset of the leadership election polling amongst voters on whether various candidates would make good or bad prime ministers produced the following feedback: Johnson -29 (26 percent good to 55 percent bad) as compared to Hancock -7 (7 to 14), Stewart -7 (6 to 13), Javid -12 (20 to 32), Raab -14 (12 to 26), Leadsom -14 (16 to 30), Hunt -34 (12 to 46) and Gove -40 (12 to 52), although these findings have to account for the high level of ‘don’t knows’ amongst some of the less well known candidates (YouGov, 2019a). Once the contest had been narrowed down to Johnson and Hunt, opinion polling identified limited evidence to suggest that selecting Johnson would aid the electability of the Conservatives. If Brexit was delivered in the autumn of 2019 then the projected vote share for the Conservatives was 25 percent under Johnson and 21 percent under Hunt. If Brexit was not delivered then those projected vote shares fell to 15 percent under Johnson and 13 percent under Hunt. To further complicate matters on the question of which candidate had the competence to be prime minister the wider electorate placed Hunt (41 percent) ahead of Johnson (29 percent) (Wells, 2019).

Qualitative analyses of Conservative Party leadership elections have tended to rely on what is known as the Stark criteria (1996). This suggests that parliamentarians will judge candidates on a hierarchy of needs; first, acceptability or which candidate will be most able to unite the party; second, electability or which candidate will be best placed to retain or regain popular support and win a general election; and three, competence, having eliminated the least acceptable and least electable, parliamentarians will prioritise the candidate who they perceive to be the best equipped for the role of being Prime Minister (Stark, 1996). However, the aforementioned opinion polling data provides some contradictory evidence in relation to the Stark criterion of acceptability, electability and competence. Moreover, that opinion polling evidence provides an insight into what the wider electorate thought or what membership preferences might be, which is limiting in terms of identifying what is influencing the choice of parliamentarians in the parliamentary screening stage of the leadership selection process.

This matters as whoever is selected as leader of the Conservative Party will be vulnerable to a confidence motion activated by Conservative parliamentarians and *not* by their members. It is therefore important to identify what factors may drive support for, or opposition to, individual candidates and ultimately the candidate who emerges as the next Conservative Party leader and



Prime Minister. Can any patterns of opinion be identified in terms of the relationship between Conservative parliamentarians and the candidates they backed in the final parliamentary ballot between Johnson, Hunt and Gove?

## **Data Collection: Hypotheses and Variables**

### *Hypotheses*

Our aim was to explore what might be motivating the voting behaviour of Conservative parliamentarians. We wanted to test the dataset for evidence that voter choice could have been driven by either their Euroscepticism, their view of May's leadership or of her Brexit deal, the impact Brexit would have on their local economy, and ideological considerations. As such we used our dataset to test the following five hypotheses:

*H1: Euroscepticism Hypothesis:* Conservative parliamentarians who voted to leave the EU will be more likely to vote for Johnson or Gove than Hunt compared to those who voted to remain.

*H2: Party Politics Hypothesis:* Conservative parliamentarians who voted 'no confidence' in May's leadership are more likely to vote for Johnson than Hunt and Gove compared to those who had confidence.

*H3: Brexit Deal Hypothesis:* Conservative parliamentarians who voted against May's Withdrawal Agreement in the first meaningful vote (MV1) will be more likely to vote for Johnson than Hunt or Gove compared to those who voted against MV1.

*H4: Economic Hypothesis:* Conservative parliamentarians who hold constituencies where the projected economic impact<sup>3</sup> (job losses) from a no deal Brexit is higher will be more likely to vote for Hunt than Johnson or Gove compared to those representing constituencies where the projected impact would be less.

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<sup>3</sup> We included the projected job losses associated with the risks of a No Deal Brexit as this could be higher depending on the type of candidate who won. Conservative parliamentarians seeking re-election could be blamed by their constituents for those job losses if they had supported a candidate who made that outcome more likely.

*H5: Social Liberalism Hypothesis:* Conservative parliamentarians who are more socially liberal will be more likely to vote for Gove than Johnson or Hunt compared to socially conservative parliamentarians<sup>4</sup>.

Identifying whether such patterns of opinion may have existed demands that we construct a dataset on the 2017-2019 PCP, covering those who were eligible to vote in the eliminative parliamentary ballots in June 2019. None of the 317 Conservatives elected at the General Election of 2017 had resigned or passed away by the time of leadership election, but four no longer held the Conservative whip. Heidi Allen, Anna Soubry and Sarah Wollaston left in February 2019 to join the Independent Group, later Change UK and then the Independent Group for Change. Allen and Wollaston later reverted to being independents in June 2019 and then both joined the Liberal Democrats (Wollaston in August and Allen in October). Nick Boles also resigned the Conservative whip in March 2019 in order to sit as an Independent Conservative. With the Conservatives having gained no seats in by-elections since the General Election of 2017 our dataset comprised of 313 Conservative parliamentarians.

In terms of what we wanted our dataset to cover we were influenced by the variables selected in previous studies of Conservative Party leadership elections (see Cowley and Garry 1998; Cowley and Bailey 2000; Heppell and Hill, 2008, 2010; Jeffery *et al*, 2018) *and* circumstances specific to the political environment at the time of the 2019 Conservative Party leadership election. We selected the following control variables for our dataset: the social background variables of age and gender; variables associated with parliamentarians' position in the Commons, i.e. whether they held a ministerial position or not, when they first entered parliament, whether they were a member of the Eurosceptic European Research Group of Conservative MPs, their majority, and the constituency's estimated vote share for leaving the EU in the 2016 referendum.

For our independent variables, we included the parliamentarian's position in the EU referendum, how they voted in the confidence vote in May's leadership of the Conservative Party, whether they voted for the Withdrawal Agreement in the first so-called meaningful vote, the projected economic impact (job losses) within parliamentarians' constituencies under a no-deal Brexit and how socially liberal they are.

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<sup>4</sup> These assumptions about voting and the liberal-conservative divide derive from the findings on the ideological composition of the parliamentary Conservative Party at the time of the Conservative Party leadership election of 2016. Based on extensive studies of voting behaviour, public and private comments and membership of party groupings, this positioned the three candidates on the social, sexual and morality divide from which we can deduce that Gove was the more liberal leaning (Jeffery *et al*, 2018).

### *Dependent Variable*

Our primary methodological challenge was establishing the voting behaviour of Conservative parliamentarians in the final parliamentary ballot. To do this, we combined the declared supporter lists for Johnson, Hunt and Gove provided online on the day of the vote from the following sources: we used the Guido Fawkes tally from <https://www.order-order.com/backers>, the Conservative Home tally from <https://www.conservativehome.com/parliament/2019/05/leadership-election-candidate-support-numbers-hunt-27-johnson-19-raab-13-gove-12-javid-10.html>, and the Spectator count which was taken from <https://blogs.spectator.co.uk/2019/06/full-list-the-tory-leadership-contenders-and-the-mps-backing-them>. By cross referencing these methods we were able to ascertain the probable voting preference of all but 87 members of the PCP (72.2 percent).

### *Independent variables*

We gathered the data for our control variables by the following method. With regard to age, gender and constituency majority we collected this from information provided online via the House of Commons Library (available at <https://researchbriefings.parliament.uk/ResearchBriefing/Summary/CBP-7979>). We used Chris Hanretty's estimates of constituency leave vote shares provided in Pippa Norris' database (available at <https://www.pippanorris.com/data>). For whether an MP was a minister or not we consulted the UK Parliament website with our data based on ministerial status as of 13<sup>th</sup> June 2019 (available at <https://www.parliament.uk/mps-lords-and-offices/government-and-opposition1/her-majestys-government/>) and for the year parliamentarians first entered parliament we used a dataset provided by NESTA (available at <https://www.nesta.org.uk/blog/open-dataset-who-are-the-2017-general-elections-candidates/>). To establish whether Conservative parliamentarians were members of the European Research Group we used the lists provided in the *Financial Times* (available at <https://ig.ft.com/brexit-tory-tribes/>).

We gathered data for our independent variables from the following sources. On how Conservative parliamentarians voted in the EU Referendum of 2016 we used the findings from the study by Heppell *et al* (2017)<sup>5</sup>. It is worth noting that some Conservative parliamentarians

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<sup>5</sup> For a wider discussion on the evolving composition of the parliamentary Conservatives Party in the last five years, see Alexandre-Collier, 2019, 2020a, 2020b.

would not have been members of the PCP at the time of the EU referendum. For these MPs we updated the datasets of Heppell *et al* (2017) by examining their parliamentary webpages and social media accounts to include their votes if they had declared them and complemented this with Lynch and Whitaker's dataset (2018). On how MPs voted in the confidence motion ballot of December 2018 we used the findings from the dataset constructed by Roe-Crines *et al* (2020).

We used the division list recorded in Hansard for the meaningful vote one (HC Deb, 15 January, Vol. 652, Div. 293) and to determine the estimated level of job losses per constituency that would result from a no deal Brexit we used the UK Trade Policy Observatory findings compiled by Winters and Serwicka, available at <https://blogs.sussex.ac.uk/uktpo/2018/12/10/the-vulnerability-of-different-parliamentary-constituencies-to-brexit-economic-shocks/>. To gauge whether an MP was socially liberal or conservative we combined their position on abortion and same-sex marriage. We classed MPs as pro-life or pro-choice based on their votes on restricting sex-selective abortions, a clause attached to the 2015 Serious Crime Bill (see <https://www.publicwhip.org.uk/division.php?date=2015-02-23&number=157>) and complemented this with how MPs voted on the amendment to the Northern Ireland (Executive Formation) Bill 2019, which would allow for abortions to take place in Northern Ireland in the same way as in the rest of the United Kingdom (see <https://commonsvotes.digiminster.com/Divisions/Details/700?byMember=false>). We classed MPs as pro- or anti-same-sex marriage based on their vote on the second reading of the Marriage (Same Sex Couples) Bill (see <https://www.publicwhip.org.uk/division.php?date=2013-02-05&number=151>) and complemented this with how MPs voted on the amendment to the Northern Ireland (Executive Formation) Bill 2019, which would allow for same-sex marriages to take place in Northern Ireland (see <https://commonsvotes.digiminster.com/Divisions/Details/699?byMember=false>). In the few cases where there was a conflict between MPs' old and new votes on these matters, we went with their most recent vote.

## **Research Findings**

Our research findings are presented in a series of tables, below, showing a model for each of the above hypotheses, followed by a full model with all variables included. The model should be read as showing support for the relevant candidate (Johnson, Hunt and Gove respectively) compared to not supporting them, with coefficients representing increases or decreases in log-odds.

We find that for Johnson all our models are statistically significant (i.e.  $\text{prob} > \chi^2 = 0.000$  for all models). In terms of our control variables, across all models as the age of an MP increases the log-odds of them supporting Johnson decreases, suggesting that older MPs are less likely to vote for the eventual winner. This would demonstrate an alignment between older parliamentarians and older members, given that YouGov polling had demonstrated how, just prior to the first parliamentary ballot, that older members preferred Hunt, Leadsom and Raab over Johnson (YouGov, 2019b). Similarly, in all models bar the full model, the higher the estimated constituency leave vote the higher the likelihood of MPs supporting Johnson, and MPs who were members of the ERG also had increased odds of supporting Johnson. We also find that gender and holding a ministerial position was only statistically significant in some models, and neither was significant in the final model. The fact that, in some cases, being female increased the log-odds of support for Johnson, or was not statistically significant at all, suggests that his colourful past was not putting off female MPs, whilst the fact that the size of an MPs' majorities was not a statistically significant factor suggests that MPs were not supporting Johnson because they were concerned about their own majority – many with relatively safe majorities were also supporting Johnson.

In terms of our hypotheses, we find a clear relationship between how an MP voted in terms of the EU referendum and their support for Johnson – those who voted remain were less likely to support Johnson, when holding all other variables constant. This provides support for *H1*. We also find support for *H2* and *H3* – MPs who voted no confidence in May as leader of the Conservative Party were more likely to support Johnson than not, and those who opposed May's Withdrawal Agreement in the first meaningful vote also had higher log-odds of supporting Johnson. We do not, however, find any support for *H4* – our economic hypothesis or *H5* – our social liberalism hypothesis.

What is interesting is that, in the full model only age and referendum position are statistically significant for predicting support for Johnson. Thus, for all the talk about different factions within the Conservative Party, Johnson's support was mainly drawn from one side of the key divide in the Conservative Party: position in the EU referendum.

For Hunt, we once again see that all the models are statistically significant, and the converse effect to Johnson in terms of the age variable – across all models, the older the MP the greater the log-odds of supporting Hunt. We also see that across some models ERG membership is negatively associated with support for Hunt - although this is not the case in the final, full model. With regard to *H1*, we clearly see that even when controlling for ERG membership MPs who supported remain in 2016 were more likely to support Hunt than not support him. Similarly, those who had no confidence in May were less likely to support Hunt, and those who voted against the Withdrawal

Agreement in the first meaningful vote were also less likely to support Hunt – thus providing support for *H2* and *H3*. Like with Johnson, we see no evidence for *H4* or *H5*, suggesting constituency job-losses nor an MP's social liberalism did not play a role in deciding how to vote in the leadership election.

For Gove, we see that all the models bar the social liberalism model are statistically significant. Unlike with the previous two tables, the only consistently relevant control variable is when MPs first entered parliament – MPs who entered under May, mainly in the 2017 general election, were more likely to support Gove. This, however, is likely due to Gove's concentrated support amongst MPs representing constituencies in his native Scotland (indeed, if we include holding a Scottish constituency as a dummy variable this relationship disappears across all models). We find no support for *H1* or *H2*; there is no statistically significant relationship between EU position or confidence in May's leadership and support for Gove. However, we see that those who were against May's Withdrawal Agreement were less likely to support Gove, perhaps due to the fact that, despite being a leaver, he stayed in May's government when Davis and Johnson resigned. Similarly to the other two candidates, we find no support for *H4* or *H5* vis-à-vis support for Gove. When we look at the full model, we can see that MPs who came into office under May, who voted for the Withdrawal Agreement, and whose vote in confidence vote was unknown were more likely to support Gove.

We can add an element of nuance to our analysis by examining whether any specification error exists in each of our full models by running a link test for our regression equations. This produces some interesting results. It shows that the models for support for Johnson and Hunt are good ( $p=0.000$  and  $p=0.026$  respectively) but our model for support for Gove is not ( $p=0.330$ ), suggesting that the variables which have predictive power for Johnson's and Hunt's supporters do not for Gove. Following from this is the suggestion that Gove was drawing support from completely different groups to Johnson and Hunt, groups which are not captured by our model. This could be for two reasons – firstly, that we have missed a salient variable (although the results of goodness of fit tests do not suggest our model is poorly specified), or secondly, that Gove's support was based on something harder to measure, such as personal connections, friendships within the PCP or those who admire him for his reforming zeal shown during his time as Education Secretary and Environment Secretary.

Overall, our findings show that Johnson and Hunt were drawing support from two different parts of the 2019 PCP. Johnson's support was drawn from MPs who supported leaving the EU, those who had no confidence in May's leadership and those who rejected May's Withdrawal Agreement, as well as those who were members of the European Research Group.

Johnson's support was also stronger amongst younger MPs, even when controlling for cohort of entry. In contrast, Hunt's support was drawn from MPs who voted remain, who had confidence in May's leadership, who backed her Withdrawal Agreement, and who were not members of the ERG. This lends weight to the charge made by Johnson supporters that Hunt represented 'continuity May'. Just as interesting, however, is the models' worse performance when it comes to explaining support for Gove. Unlike in 2016, and with Johnson and Hunt in 2019, Gove's support is not partly explained by position in the referendum nor by appealing to a socially-liberal wing of the PCP. Whilst we provide evidence that Gove's support came from those who voted against May's deal the first time, our link tests show that our models are not as effective at predicting support for Gove.

**Table Two: Models for Support for Johnson amongst the PCP**

N	308			308			308			308			308			308			
Prob > chi2	0.000			0.000			0.000			0.000			0.000			0.000			
Pseudo R2	0.191			0.188			0.181			0.164			0.168			0.216			
Age	-0.05	**	0.02	-0.05	**	0.02	-0.05	**	0.02	-0.05	**	0.02	-0.05	**	0.02	-0.05	**	0.02	
Female	0.65		0.35	0.70	*	0.35	0.63		0.35	0.68	*	0.35	0.67		0.35	0.61		0.37	
Minister	0.40		0.33	0.58		0.33	0.67	*	0.34	0.37		0.32	0.38		0.32	0.67		0.35	
First Entered Parliament (relative to under Cameron)																			
Pre-Cameron	0.12		0.35	-0.01		0.36	0.01		0.35	0.10		0.34	0.07		0.35	-0.01		0.37	
May	-0.53		0.52	-0.22		0.52	-0.30		0.51	-0.38		0.51	-0.45		0.52	-0.41		0.54	
ERG Member	1.31	***	0.40	1.09	*	0.46	1.41	***	0.41	2.07	***	0.33	1.98	***	0.34	0.46		0.51	
Majority (%)	-0.01		0.01	0.00		0.01	0.00		0.01	0.00		0.01	0.00		0.01	-0.01		0.01	
Constituency Leave Vote (%)	0.03	*	0.02	0.04	**	0.02	0.04	*	0.02	0.04	*	0.02	0.04	**	0.02	0.03		0.02	
MP: Remain	-1.13	***	0.33													-1.00	**	0.34	
Confidence Vote (relative to having confidence in May)																			
No Confidence				1.52	**	0.51												0.71	0.63
Unknown				0.19		0.47												-0.19	0.52
Against MV1							1.09	**	0.40									0.69	0.49
Brexit-related Job Loss (%)										-0.05		0.23						-0.12	0.24
Social Liberalism (relative to being socially liberal)																			
Soc Agnostic													-0.52		0.44	-0.50		0.47	
Soc Lib													-0.37		0.33	-0.34		0.35	
Unknown													-0.25		0.44	-0.27		0.46	
Constant	-0.44		1.51	-2.06		1.45	-1.97		1.42	-1.74		1.64	-1.21		1.54	0.32		1.84	
Log likelihood	-171.75			-172.52			-173.91			-177.65			-176.69			-166.53			



**Table Three: Models for Support for Hunt amongst the PCP**

N	308			308			308			308			308			308		
Prob > chi2	0.000			0.000			0.000			0.000			0.000			0.000		
Pseudo R2	0.141			0.161			0.148			0.126			0.142			0.194		
Age	0.05	*	0.02	0.04	*	0.02	0.04	*	0.02	0.05	*	0.02	0.05	**	0.02	0.05	**	0.02
Female	-0.36		0.41	-0.47		0.42	-0.41		0.41	-0.44		0.41	-0.36		0.42	-0.37		0.44
Minister	-0.17		0.37	-0.42		0.38	-0.44		0.38	-0.15		0.37	-0.13		0.37	-0.38		0.39
First Entered Parliament (relative to under Cameron)																		
Pre-Cameron	-0.26		0.43	0.06		0.44	-0.02		0.44	-0.24		0.43	-0.32		0.44	-0.13		0.46
May	-0.56		0.71	-0.80		0.71	-0.69		0.72	-0.59		0.71	-0.35		0.72	-0.45		0.74
ERG Member	-1.78	*	0.85	-0.72		0.95	-1.64		0.86	-2.62	***	0.76	-2.45	***	0.76	-0.11		1.05
Majority (%)	0.00		0.01	-0.01		0.01	-0.01		0.01	0.00		0.01	0.00		0.01	0.00		0.01
Constituency Leave Vote (%)	-0.02		0.02	-0.03		0.02	-0.03		0.02	-0.03		0.02	-0.02		0.02	-0.02		0.02
MP: Remain	1.06	*	0.50													0.79		0.51
Confidence Vote (relative to having confidence in May)																		
No Confidence				-3.02	*	1.25										-2.21		1.38
Unknown				-1.23		0.71										-0.80		0.77
Against MV1							-1.53	*	0.65							-0.63		0.73
Brexit-related Job Loss (%)										-0.29		0.30				-0.32		0.32
Social Liberalism (relative to being socially liberal)																		
Soc Agnostic													0.58		0.55	0.57		0.58
Soc Lib													0.58		0.43	0.49		0.44
Unknown													-0.63		0.72	-0.71		0.74
Constant	-2.56		1.87	-0.76		1.79	-0.84		1.82	-0.17		1.99	-2.21		1.85	-1.83		2.36
Log likelihood	-115.89			-113.24			-115.05			-118.00			-115.81			-108.72		

**Table Four: Models for Support for Gove amongst the PCP**

N	308			308			308			308			308			308		
Prob > chi2	0.042			0.012			0.004			0.032			0.059			0.010		
Pseudo R2	0.082			0.106			0.114			0.086			0.089			0.150		
Age	0.04		0.02	0.04		0.02	0.04		0.02	0.04		0.02	0.04		0.02	0.05		0.02
Female	-0.02		0.49	0.01		0.50	0.14		0.51	-0.05		0.50	0.02		0.50	0.17		0.54
Minister	-0.21		0.47	-0.23		0.47	-0.44		0.47	-0.21		0.47	-0.21		0.47	-0.35		0.48
First Entered Parliament (relative to under Cameron)																		
Pre-Cameron	-0.34		0.51	-0.34		0.53	-0.23		0.53	-0.34		0.51	-0.36		0.52	-0.42		0.56
May	1.54	**	0.57	1.50	**	0.57	1.52	**	0.58	1.58	**	0.57	1.68	**	0.59	1.93	**	0.63
ERG Member	-1.24		0.67	-0.53		0.77	-0.21		0.75	-1.33	*	0.58	-1.20	*	0.60	-0.20		0.90
Majority (%)	0.01		0.02	0.01		0.02	0.01		0.02	0.01		0.02	0.01		0.02	0.01		0.02
Constituency Leave Vote (%)	0.00		0.02	0.00		0.02	0.01		0.02	0.00		0.02	0.00		0.02	0.00		0.02
MP: Remain	0.10		0.48													-0.06		0.51
Confidence Vote (relative to having confidence in May)																		
No Confidence				-1.46		0.97										-0.06		1.17
Unknown				0.54		0.58										1.33	*	0.65
Against MV1							-1.73	*	0.72							-1.85	*	0.80
Brexit-related Job Loss (%)										-0.31		0.33				-0.42		0.34
Social Liberalism (relative to being socially liberal)																		
Soc Agnostic													0.69		0.62	0.98		0.67
Soc Lib													0.42		0.50	0.60		0.53
Unknown													0.00		0.67	0.01		0.70
Constant	-4.18	*	2.10	-4.07	*	2.01	-4.51	*	2.15	-3.08		2.24	-4.80	*	2.14	-4.18		2.62
Log likelihood	-98.24			-95.64			-94.80			-97.82			-97.43			-90.91		

## Conclusion

The aim of this paper was three-fold: first, to profile the candidates and campaigning period of the Conservative Party leadership election of 2019; second, to determine the voting behaviour of Conservative parliamentarians in the final parliamentary ballot; and third, to determine what factors might explain their voting preferences.

This is an important academic study to engage in for the following reasons. Identifying how and why Johnson was the preferred candidate of parliamentarians' matters because it helped to create/sustain the momentum that would make it difficult for the membership to not select him. The selection of Johnson over Hunt or Gove would not just determine the premiership but also the short-term strategy to be deployed to implement Brexit and the future of direction of British Conservatism. Not only was this a ballot of high significance in terms of its consequences, but it was also relatively unusual for the Conservatives to use their democratic leadership election procedures to select not just their party leader but also the next Prime Minister. The only other occasions in which this has occurred is in 1990 when John Major was elected to succeed Margaret Thatcher under the old parliamentary ballots alone procedure (Cowley and Garry, 1998); and in 2016 when May was elected to succeed David Cameron via the eliminative ballots procedure which should have gone to a membership ballot had her rival, Leadsom, not withdrawn her candidature (Jeffery *et al*, 2018). So how do our findings on voting motivation compare to the explanations on voting behaviour in prior Conservative Party leadership elections, including both in government and opposition? The following issues emerge.

First, let us consider ideological motivations that relate to the issue of Europe. There is a long tradition of the voting preference of Conservative parliamentarians in party leadership elections being driven by the attitude of the candidates towards Europe. For example, those identifiable as Eurosceptics were statistically aligned to the candidatures of John Major in 1990; William Hague in 1997; Iain Duncan Smith in 2001; whilst those defined as pro-Europeanists were more likely to vote for Michael Heseltine in 1990, and Kenneth Clarke in 1997 and 2001 (Cowley and Garry, 1998; Heppell and Hill, 2008, 2010). Although the terminology and issues had evolved by the time of the 2016 Conservative Party leadership election, Europe remained an issue in the election of May. She acquired her support primarily from the remain wing of the PCP, with the leave wing fragmenting between the candidatures of Leadsom and Gove (Jeffery *et al*, 2018). The support for Johnson was disproportionately garnered from those who had voted leave in the EU referendum, whilst Hunt drew his support disproportionately from the those who voted remain in the EU referendum. However, the European issue in the 2019 Conservative Party leadership

election differed from how we understand its impact upon the 2016 Conservative Party leadership election. The complexities of trying to implement Brexit provided us with other linked variables to consider – i.e. voting preference in the meaningful vote on the Withdrawal Agreement; membership of the European Reform Group; and how Conservative parliamentarians voted in the confidence motion vote held on May's leadership the previous December. These factors reinforced the significance of Europe, with Johnson more likely to acquire the backing of those opposing the Withdrawal Agreement than Hunt (or Gove); Johnson was more likely to secure the support of ERG members than Hunt (or Gove); and Johnson was more likely to secure the support of those who voted against May in the confidence motion than Hunt (or Gove). When placed within their broader context, these findings provide us with further evidence of the ideological transformation of the Conservative Party in recent decades (Alexandre-Collier, 2020a; Heppell, 2020). The Conservative Party leadership election of 2019 represent the conversion of the one-time 'party of Europe' (Crowson, 2007) as the parliamentarians and then the membership, voted for a leave candidate over a remain candidate, meaning that the ideological conversion of the Conservative Party to the cause of Brexit was complete.

Second, what of ideological drivers of the vote other than attitudes towards Europe? Previous studies have showcased how the classic dry-wet distinction vis-à-vis economic intervention mattered – for example, when Major predominantly drew his support from dries and Heseltine from wets in 1990, or when Hague was preferred amongst dries and Clarke amongst wets in 1997 (Cowley and Garry, 1998; Heppell and Hill, 2008). However, the ideological reconfigurations within British Conservatism had seen the elimination of the wet-dry economic dispute. By the Cameron era, the level of wet representation within the PCP was in single figures (Heppell, 2013), meaning that just as was the case in the 2016 Conservative Party leadership (Jeffery *et al*, 2018) it was not feasible to test the economic drivers of the vote in a party that was uniformly dry. The other key ideological divide within British Conservatism beyond Europe and the economy – i.e. the morality distinction between social liberals and social conservatives – had previously been statistically significant in the Conservative Party leadership elections of 1997, 2001 and 2016 (as statistically significant relationships existed by social conservatives and voting for Hague, Duncan Smith and Leadsom respectively, Heppell and Hill, 2008, 2010; Jeffery *et al*, 2018). On the moral, sexual and morality ideological divide, our study on the 2019 Conservative Party leadership election showed that there was no statistically significant relationship between parliamentarians and the social liberalism-social conservatism cleavage in terms of voting preference, thus differentiating this leadership election from previous ones.

Third, how do our findings for the 2019 leadership election on non-ideological drivers of the vote compare to previous leadership elections? Previous studies have identified background social or political variables as potentially significant – for example, age was statistically significant in terms of voting preference in the 1997 and 2001 contests; parliamentary experience was statistically significant in terms of voter choice in the 1990, 1997 and 2016 contests; and Conservative parliamentarians and ministerial experience was identified as relevant in the 2016 contest (Cowley and Garry, 1998; Heppell and Hill, 2008, 2010; Jeffery *et al*, 2018). Our research has identified age as being statistically significant in terms of the support bases of Johnson, who appealed to younger Conservative parliamentarians, but beyond that the wider non-ideological variables did not emerge as being statistically significant.

However, one of our main objectives was to ensure that our research included variables that were sensitive to the Brexit-related circumstances that were dominating British politics at the time of the leadership election. We did this by introducing an economic hypothesis in which we assumed that parliamentarians may have been influenced by the economic risks associated with a no deal Brexit, which was an outcome that Hunt appeared to be determined to avoid and that Johnson appeared to willing to countenance (or use as a negotiating ploy). We considered the risk of a no deal Brexit via estimates of job losses within constituencies. When we focused on the constituencies of Conservative parliamentarians' we discovered the following. Not only did marginality fail to emerge as being statistically significant as a determinant of voting, but more importantly the projected economic impact upon constituencies (i.e. job losses) did not emerge as being an influence upon Conservative parliamentarians when choosing between Johnson, Hunt and Gove. From these findings it can be argued that many Conservative parliamentarians, who were advocating a hard Brexit, will have concluded that this would not prove too damaging to their mostly more affluent, service-sector, white-collar constituencies, as compared to the more industrial/manufacturing constituencies that were more likely to be held by Labour. Critically, our paper suggests that the Conservative parliamentarians voting preferences cannot be explained by the likely economic impacts to their constituencies associated with Brexit, but their voting preferences can be explained by their ideological considerations vis-à-vis Brexit.

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