



Conservative Leadership Contenders

June 2019



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Boris Johnson



Michael Gove



Sajid Javid



Jeremy Hunt



Dominic Raab



Matt Hancock



Rory Stewart



Esther McVey



Andrea Leadsom



Mark Harper

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Boris Johnson “the favourite”

Although the favourite is never supposed to win a Conservative leadership election, Johnson is a man who believes it is his destiny to be the Prime Minister. Expected to be the members' choice, if his team can continue to ensure he says a little as possible and if he can survive heavy fire from the other candidates, Johnson ought to win this time. It is his race to lose.

- MP for Uxbridge and South Ruislip since 2015
- Foreign Secretary 2016-2018
- Mayor of London 2008-2016
- MP for Henley 2001-2008

Brexit position

One of the most prominent members of the 2016 Vote Leave campaign, Johnson became Foreign Secretary in Theresa May's administration but resigned due to disagreements over the Prime Minister's Brexit approach in July 2018. Johnson voted against Mrs May's Brexit deal on two occasions, but voted for it at the 3rd time of asking, stating that he feared it would be the only option for delivering Brexit at that time. While his Brexit position has been inconsistent over the last three years, his most recent position is that the UK “will leave on October 31st - with or without a deal.” Johnson hopes to first renegotiate the Brexit deal with the EU, and then if unsuccessful leave with no-deal. The key changes he would seek include only paying the £39billion divorce payment if the EU offer “more favourable terms”, removing the Northern Irish backstop and removing civil servants from the negotiating team.

2016
Position

Leave

2019
Position

Leave on 31 October, deal or
no-deal

Other key policies

- Pledged to raise the higher rate threshold of income tax to £80,000, paid for by the funds set aside for no-deal Brexit preparation.
- Reduce stamp duty on homes.

Key supporters

- Currently the most of any candidate. An even mix between Brexit and Remain voting Conservatives but with key ERG supporters including Jacob Rees-Mogg.
- One-time expected leadership candidates Liz Truss, James Cleverley, Steve Baker and Kit Malthouse.

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Sajid Javid “the modern Conservative”

With a personal story that is difficult to ignore, Javid is pitching himself as the face of modern Conservatism. As the first ever Muslim Home Secretary, but still someone who is known to be tough on immigration and fiscally conservative, Javid ought to be the ideal candidate. However, his messages have struggled to cut through to date and he will need to work hard to convince the MPs that he is the Cabinet candidate to take on Boris Johnson, rather than Jeremy Hunt.

- MP for Bromsgrove since 2010
- Home Secretary since 2018
- Housing, Communities and Local Government Secretary 2016-2018
- Business, Innovation and Skills Secretary 2015-2016
- Culture, Media and Sport Secretary 2014-2015

Brexit position

A long-time Eurosceptic, Javid surprises colleagues by supporting Remain in the 2016 referendum. Since the referendum, however, he has positioned himself as a firm Leaver. In a video announcing his leadership bid, Javid said “first and foremost we must deliver Brexit.” He has been broadly supportive of the Prime Minister’s Brexit deal. Perceived as a hardliner on immigration issues, he has been responsible for leading on plans for the post-Brexit immigration system.

2016 Position

Remain

2019 Position

Renegotiate Withdrawal Agreement and do everything possible to leave on 31 October.
Has not expressly ruled out extending the deadline further but he would “choose no deal over no Brexit”.

Other key policies

- Increased investment in schools.
- Scrap 100,000 net migration target.
- £1 billion over three years to fund 20,000 more police officers.

Key supporters

- Currently trailing behind other candidates with largely Remain orientated Conservative support. Popular amongst more recent intake MPs.
- Leader of the Scottish Conservatives Ruth Davidson and his three current Home Office Ministers Caroline Nokes, Victoria Atkins and Baroness Williams.

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Jeremy Hunt “the grown-up”

Having secured the largest backing of existing Cabinet Ministers and Tory grandees, Hunt is pitching himself as the statesman-like unity candidate whose background in business will help him negotiate a good Brexit deal. Given Michael Gove’s campaign difficulties, the chances of Hunt reaching the final two candidates have greatly increased. He will need to focus on demonstrating his Brexit credentials if he is to receive the support of Conservative Members.

- MP for South West Surrey since 2005
- Foreign Secretary since 2018
- Health Secretary 2012-2018
- Culture, Olympics, Media and Sport Secretary 2010-2012

Brexit position

Jeremy Hunt backed Remain in the 2016 referendum, and since then his position has changed on a number of occasions. Hunt was one of the earliest backers of a second referendum on the terms of Brexit (June 2016), before then calling for the UK to retain single market membership (October 2017). He later stated that the UK would “prosper under a no-deal” (August 2018). More recently he has described a no-deal Brexit as “cataclysmic” (December 2018). So far in the leadership contest, Hunt has pushed his business credentials as a means to negotiate the UK’s way out of the Brexit impasse and although he has not ruled out an extension to the October deadline, he has also refused to rule out no deal. He also claims Angela Merkel is ready to renegotiate the Brexit deal.

2016 Position

Remain

2019 Position

Renegotiate Withdrawal Agreement and avoid no-deal. However he would “choose no deal over no Brexit”.

Other key policies

- Increase investment in schools through a “social mission”.
- Focus education investment on young people who do not attend university.
- Cut corporation tax to one of the lowest levels in Europe.

Key supporters

- Largely Remain voting MPs.
- Hunt has secured the backing of the most cabinet ministers of all of the challengers including Penny Mordaunt, Amber Rudd and Greg Clark.

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Dominic Raab “the tough guy”

Raab is pitching himself to MPs and members as being the tough, confident Brexiteer who will take the fight to the EU and will be very happy to leave with no-deal. He knows that his only chance to win is to convince members that his serious approach to Brexit will be far more successful than the “bluff and bluster” of Boris Johnson, so expect his campaign to focus heavily on Johnson’s supposed lightweight politics.

- MP for Esher and Walton since 2010
- Brexit Secretary July 2018-November 2018
- Housing and Planning Minister January 2018-July 2018
- Courts and Justice Minister July 2017-January 2018

Brexit position

Dominic Raab is seen as one of the strongest supporters of a no-deal Brexit within the leadership race. A former Brexit Secretary, he resigned in opposition to the Draft Withdrawal Agreement. Like Boris Johnson, Raab has stated that he would first seek to renegotiate a Brexit deal with the EU. If this was unsuccessful, he has stated he would push for a “manged no-deal”. He also suggested that proroguing Parliament until after 31 October could be a method of ensuring a no-deal Brexit without the backing of MPs. Raab’s pitch to Conservative members is as the “Brexiteer you can rely on”.

2016
Position

Leave

2019
Position

Leave on 31 October, deal or
no-deal

Other key policies

- Cut 1p off income tax for everyone.
- Raise the National Insurance threshold to £12,500.

Key supporters

- Largely supported by hard-line Brexiteer MPs including Andrea Jenkyns and Anne-Marie Morris.
- Secured the support of his predecessor as Brexit retary, David Davis.

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Michael Gove “the safe(ish) option”

Gove has tried hard to present himself as the safe pair of hands; a tough Brexiteer but not as extreme as some, a small ‘c’ conservative on the economy but liberal on the environment. The recent revelations about his Class A drug use have damaged his safe image and he must now hope to shift the fire to other candidates if he is to succeed.

- MP for Surrey Heath since 2005
- Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Secretary since 2017
- Justice Secretary 2015-2016
- Chief Whip 2014-2015
- Education Secretary 2010-2014

Brexit position

Alongside Boris Johnson, Michael Gove was one of the most prominent Leave supporters among Conservative MPs in the 2016 referendum. Following accusations of disloyalty to Johnson in the subsequent leadership election, Gove has sought to display high levels of support for the Prime Minister. He has been one of the most vocal proponents of Mrs May’s deal, and is thought by some to be the best candidate for bridging the gap between the hard Brexiteers of the European Research Group and other more moderate MPs. Gove has said that if he became Prime Minister, he would offer free citizenship to the three million EU nationals resident in the UK.

2016 Position

Leave

2019 Position

Renegotiate Withdrawal Agreement, short extension to 31 October deadline if necessary

Other key policies

- Scrap VAT and replace it with a sales tax.
- Reduce business rates for small high street businesses.
- Continue to enhance environmental protections.

Key supporters

- An even mix of all sides of the Conservative Party, with strong backing from MPs who voted for the Withdrawal Agreement.
- Has the backing of Economic Affairs Committee Chair Nicky Morgan and Education Secretary Damian Hinds.

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Esther McVey “the true Brexiteer”

By launching her campaign alongside an image of Margaret Thatcher, McVey was making a clear pitch as the working class female candidate; a true Brexiteer from the North who understands what people want from Brexit. On the right of the party on most issues, McVey is likely to struggle to convince both MPs and Members that she has the policies and the presence to be Prime Minister whatever her Brexit credentials.

- MP for Tatton since 2017
- Work and Pensions Secretary January 2018-November 2018
- Deputy Chief Whip 2017-2018
- Employment Minister 2013-2015
- MP for Wirral West 2010-2015

Brexit position

McVey is considered to be a hard Brexiteer, linked to the European Research Group of Eurosceptic MPs. She resigned as Work and Pensions Secretary in protest against the Draft Withdrawal Agreement in November 2018, however she did vote for the deal in Meaningful Vote 3 in March 2019. More recently, McVey has said that the UK should ramp up its no-deal preparations and be prepared to leave deal, or no-deal, on October 31st. McVey has stated that she would exit negotiations with the EU and refuse to negotiate further unless the EU offers a completely different deal. Ms McVey is also an advocate for proroguing Parliament to allow a no-deal Brexit.

2016
Position

Leave

2019
Position

Leave on 31 October, deal or
no-deal

Other key policies

- Increase defence spending.
- Reduce the foreign aid budget.
- Guarantee pay increases for public sector workers at the rate of inflation or higher.

Key supporters

- With one of the lowest numbers of declared supporters, McVey is currently at risk of early elimination from the contest.
- Has the backing of hard Brexiteers Philip Davies and Ben Bradley.

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Matt Hancock “the techy optimist”

As an outsider in the contest, Hancock’s campaign pitch is specifically designed to be positive, fun and above all focussed on his love of all things technology related. However, Hancock is a known remain voter and he will have some work to do to convince members of his Brexit credentials. His best hope is probably to make enough noise that he lands a big Cabinet role under the next leader.

- MP for West Suffolk since 2010
- Health and Social Care Secretary since 2018
- Digital, Culture, Media and Sport Secretary January 2018-July 2018
- Digital Minister 2016-2017
- Cabinet Office Minister 2015-2016

Brexit position

A protégé of George Osborne, Hancock supported Remain in the 2016 referendum, and has been relatively absent from the ongoing Brexit debate, preferring instead to pursue his policy agenda in cabinet roles as Culture Secretary and Health Secretary. In recent months he has been vocal on Brexit, saying that it is “mission critical” to deliver Brexit before any general election is held. Hancock has stated that he is not a support of no-deal Brexit and that it is “vital” that a deal is reached. Instead Hancock has called for a time limit to the backstop, a new council to stop a hard border in Northern Ireland, and £1billion of funding to support the use of new technologies and trusted trade schemes on the border.

2016 Position

Remain

2019 Position

Renegotiate Withdrawal Agreement and avoid no-deal

Other key policies

- Reduce business rates for small businesses.
- New levy on Amazon and other large online retailers.
- Increase National Living Wage to £10.21 by 2022.

Key supporters

- Hancock is also exclusively supported by Remain voting MPs.
- He is supported by former and existing ministerial colleagues including Tracey Crouch, Seema Kennedy and Margot James, alongside key Cabinet Minister David Liddington.

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Andrea Leadsom “the last Brexiteer standing”

Leadsom believes she is the only Brexiteer who stuck around in the Cabinet to try to make Brexit actually happen. Unfortunately, given she backed Theresa May’s deal she is struggling to shake off the perception that she would be unable to deliver the real Brexit Conservative Members want. This, coupled with her difficult exit in the last leadership campaign, make success very unlikely.

- MP for South Northamptonshire since 2010
- Leader of the House of Commons 2017-2019
- Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Secretary 2016-2017
- Energy Minister 2015-2016

Brexit position

Andrea Leadsom campaigned for Vote Leave in the 2016 referendum and continues to be a strong supporter of Brexit. In May 2019 she resigned from the Cabinet in protest over Mrs May’s Brexit strategy. Leadsom, is strongly against a second referendum and has argued that the UK would not be “truly sovereign” under the Prime Minister’s proposed deal. She has stated that her three step approach to a “managed exit” from the EU will involve ratifying parts of the Withdrawal Agreement that have Parliamentary support, seeking some element of re-negotiation with the EU and leaving by 31 October. She has stated that a further extension to the exit deadline is unlikely to be agreed by the EU.

2016 Position

Leave

2019 Position

Renegotiate, secure
Parliamentary approval to
sections of the Withdrawal
Agreement and leave by 31
October.

Other key policies

- No attempt to make large tax changes.
- More engagement with the public through regular phone calls or Q&A sessions.
- Urgent review into whether HS2 constitutes value for money for taxpayers.

KEY SUPPORTERS

- Despite finishing second in the 2016 contest, Leadsom has one of the lowest number of confirmed supporters and is at risk of early elimination.
- She is supported by former Brexit Minister Chris Heaton-Harris.

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Rory Stewart

“the people’s choice”

From the outset, Stewart has opted for a different approach by taking the contest ‘to the people’ on a self-imposed national tour with a series of realistic, grown-up policies. His videos have garnered millions of views on social media and national polling of voters puts Stewart far higher up the list than the similar polling of Conservative Members. Unfortunately, Members will have the ultimate choice and Stewart has little chance of prevailing, although his successful campaign approach may stand him in good stead in the future.

- MP for Penrith and the Border since 2010
- International Development Secretary since May 2019
- Prisons Ministers 2018-2019
- Minister for Africa 2017-2018

Brexit position

A Remain supporter in 2016, Stewart has called for a Citizens’ Assembly to debate and resolve the Brexit impasse. Stewart suggested that all sides of the Brexit debate should be included in the Assembly, which would be chaired by the Archbishop of Canterbury. Stewart has publically stated that as Prime Minister he would rule out a no-deal Brexit, calling no-deal “damaging and divisive.” He has also stated that he would disregard a number of Theresa May’s negotiation “red lines” and secure a deal that could command the support of Parliament.

2016 Position

Remain

2019 Position

Citizen’s Assembly and renegotiate Withdrawal Agreement. Rule out no-deal.

Other key policies

- Establish a position of First Secretary of State for the Union to strengthen the Union.
- Increase foreign aid spending.
- Scrap fixed immigration targets.

Key supporters

- Currently Stewart has much higher popularity in public polls than with Conservative MPs.
- He has secured the support of Tory grandees Ken Clarke and Nicholas Soames and Justice Secretary David Gauke.

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Mark Harper “the smooth outsider”

Harper is pitching himself as the fresh outsider, with a calm approach to Brexit that will help navigate the difficulties of Parliament and the EU. The only candidate to launch his campaign with an ‘unscripted’ speech, Harper hopes his credible appearance will help disguise one of the most inexperienced political careers in the race. Probably his best hope is to achieve a key role under a new leader.

- MP for Forest of Dean since 2005
- Chief Whip 2015-2016
- Minister for Disabled People 2014-2015
- Immigration Minister 2012-2014

Brexit position

Mark Harper campaigned for Remain in the 2016 referendum but has stated that he “respects the result unconditionally.” Harper voted in favour of Mrs May’s deal at Meaningful Vote 3, having previously voted against citing concerns over the Northern Ireland backstop. He has stated that MPs must “compromise” to ensure Brexit is delivered and has stated that he is concerned about the impact of a potential no-deal but that it would remain “on the table” under his leadership. However, Harper has said that he would choose no deal rather than no Brexit.

2016 Position

Remain

2019 Position

Renegotiate Withdrawal
Agreement

Other key policies

- Scrap fixed immigration target and replace with a skills based system.
- Increase house building in targeted regional areas.
- Increase investment in schools.

Key supporters

- As one of the latest candidates to declare, Harper is short of MP supporters.
- He has secured the support of staunch Brexiteer Scott Mann and former whip colleagues David Evennett and Jackie Doyle-Price.



Got any questions?

**Contact our Public Affairs Team
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