

**Interview with Patrick Dunleavy, Professor of Political Science and Public Policy
Government Department, LSE
8th May 2008**

00:00

Justin Gest:

Hi I'm Justin Gest a doctoral student here at the LSE and welcome to the HotSeat.

With me today to discuss the London Mayoral election is Professor of Political Science and Public Policy, Patrick Dunleavy. As you may or may not already know, last week Conservative Boris Johnson defeated two-time Labour mayor of London Ken Livingstone and we're going to talk about him and analyse the results and what this means for London and the rest of the UK political scene. Welcome and let's get started, Professor Dunleavy.

Now that the results are in, how did Boris defeat the legendary Mr Livingstone? Many say that Labour is to blame and their poor performance nationally, but is it that simple?

00:37

Patrick Dunleavy:

It is really that simple that in British local government elections, national government performance is very important and what Ken Livingstone did actually was perform incredibly well at 20 points above the national labour vote. But that wasn't enough to save him and Boris was a great celebrity candidate with instant name recognition

01:00

JG:

Well, in terms of other types of performances, you designed the electoral system that actually selects the mayor and the assembly for London. How did the system perform this time around?

01.11

PD:

I think the result was a great result for the system because it was designed to work with two very clear candidates, Conservative and Labour usually, and both those parties had very popular, very high name-recognition candidates. So you have a first preference and a second preference, but if you're going to use that second preference you have to know who the top two candidates are going to be, you have to guess who the top two candidates are going to be. And that was very easy to do this time, so turnout went up very radically from 37% to 45%, which is a great result in a generally declining turnout situation in Britain.

01:52

JG:

Well, speaking of second preferences, for better or worse, Ken no doubt made a visible mark on London over the years and its culture. Embracing its diversity, attracting global attention for the Olympics as and the London market while appealing to, some might say pandering to, the disenfranchised, micromanaging transport, using very slick publicity campaigns and centralising power here in London. What will be the very first identifying marks of the Boris Johnson administration here in London.

02:22

PD:

I think if he just doesn't mess anything up by the end of year one, that would be a very good result for Boris. I think the problem is that Ken is actually a great politician, a politician who can actually change something that really impacts on your daily life is a very rare thing. And Ken has done that many, many times since being London mayor he's had an outstanding record and he's going to be a really hard act to follow. And particularly Ken has had that knack which good American city mayors have of creating this sort of populist coalition, where you have voter support, where you're talking to ethnic minorities and lots of different urban interest groups, but you're also keeping urban development going and keeping the transport system running and facing down the unions. That's a huge, huge portfolio of things to do and it'll be really interesting to see if Boris can just hold it together. Nobody expects him to do much more than that, I guess.

03:24

JG:

Well, which, if any, of Boris' campaign promises do you think has the best chance of actually coming to fruition here and which obstacles do you see lying in his way?

03:34

PD:

I think getting rid of bendy buses was a great, great slogan, these great, long, sinuous buses that clog up the streets and take ages to turn round corners and everything. They will probably go quite quickly, but what will replace them, who knows, if anything. I don't think that anything else that Boris has promised has got the least chance of making any difference to anyone except that the Congestion Charge would have enlarged, but probably it now won't, there'll be a vote and it won't enlarge and that bit of London will stay gridlocked, which if you like that kind of thing is a result, I guess.

04:09

JG:

Well, the way we're talking about him, one wonders if Boris Johnson is a liability to his party or a beacon of this shift in public opinion. How close to you perceive Boris Johnson's City Hall office being with the national Conservative Party?

04:24

PD:

I think Boris Johnson is a great asset for the Conservative Party, without him they perhaps would not have won against Ken Livingstone. They had a big, strong national showing; Boris didn't do hugely better than the national showing, the national vote score for the Tories, but he's a likeable guy. As long as he doesn't mess anything up, I think he will continue to be an asset,.

Some people say that the Conservative Party will have a very close grip on City Hall. I don't think that's possible to do. David Cameron's got more than enough things to be doing without trying to run London as well. Boris will be on his own, for better or worse, with possibly a very good team.

05:09

JG:

And on the other side of the spectrum, is it clear how Labour must go about its comeback here? And if so, what exactly stands in their way?

05:19

PD:

In Britain people write political epitaphs every six months and then six months later they say, "Oh no, he's on course for victory, it's all a great result". So Labour needs to come back from its depth of local government elections, they got 24% nationally, ran third. That's a very bad result. It's not perhaps as bad a result as people are writing it up, because both the two main parties have been declining in support and that means that when you say it's the worst result since 1918, of course it's the worst result since 1918, because it's a lot lower two-party vote. People are voting for the Liberal Democrats, the Greens, the BNP, all kinds of other parties now and the journalists are just very bad at recognising that. So Labour needs to get back from where it is, 24%, to around about what they got last time, 35%, that means a 5 or 6% shift and they're beginning to make that change.

I myself believe that we could have an election by June 2009. Most other people are assuming that Labour will hang on until April or May 2010 and I think that's because it will take that long for the economy to recover and it is the economy, stupid. You know, if people are really hurting, prices are going up, they're gloomy about prospects, they punish the government in power and that's what they should do. So Labour's got to get the economy looking better, at least in prospect. The other thing it's got to do is stop doing completely pointlessly unpopular things; like the 42-day limit for terrorism is a liability; getting rid of the 10p tax is a liability; not reforming the House of Lords; continuing to obstruct democratic reforms. Gordon Brown has been incredibly hostile to various left-wing interests. He said we need lots of nuclear power plants, he hasn't pulled the troops out of Basra, we've got lots of people being killed in Afghanistan now. He could do a few left-wing things to get Labour voters won round and he could do a few genuinely popular things to get ordinary voters won round. What happens with governments that stay in power for ten or eleven years is that they believe they're god's gift to governing and they've got to govern, the century's perspective. If you want to be elected, be popular, stop doing unpopular things.

08:01

JG:

Well there it is, that simple. Plus the laundry list that follows.

08:06

PD:

Yeah, well I mean perhaps the other thing is perhaps Gordon Brown has to look different as Prime Minister. That's a more difficult thing to do, but I think as long as the government stopped doing unpopular things and started to actively build support, it wouldn't have a difficult job. The Labour Party actually performed quite well as a machine in this election and there was a surprising flow-back of people who were campaigning for it. So I don't think it's all gloom., but at the moment it's the Conservatives who are on course to look very good.

08:44

JG:

Alright, Professor Dunleavy, you are off the HotSeat. Thank you very much for participating. There's everything you could possibly want to know about the mayoral election and Boris Johnson in place at City Hall. For more from Professor Dunleavy, please consult his new book, it's called *Digital Era Governance* and you can find it at lots of academic bookshops.

Until next time, please join us on the HotSeat, I'm Justin Gest, thanks for being with us.