

# Boris Johnson Has Finally Quit. But Could His Exit Break the Tories Apart?

Former British prime minister steps down as an MP after investigation concludes he misled parliament about boozy parties held at 10 Downing Street during Covid lockdowns

By [Peter Osborne](#)

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*This time last year [Boris Johnson](#) was [British](#) prime minister.*

*Last night he [resigned](#) as an MP after receiving the findings of an investigation into whether he knowingly misled parliament over the so-called "Partygate" scandal.*

Johnson's premiership was also undone by the scandal, in which he and his staff were [accused](#) of breaking social distancing rules during the Covid-19 pandemic.

This is a momentous event in British politics. No prime minister – not even Sir Anthony Eden, who lied to the British public over the Suez fiasco in 1956 – has left office with a fraction of the infamy that is now attached to Johnson.

For Britain, the event is as momentous as the resignation of [US](#) President Richard Nixon over the Watergate scandal. Like Nixon, Johnson will henceforth be remembered as a [liar](#). Johnson was forced to quit not just Downing Street but also parliament after being exposed. Unlike Nixon, who had compensating achievements on his record, Johnson has none.

The consequences of last night are profound. First, let us consider the Conservative Party.

Late last year, Conservative Prime Minister Liz Truss was [driven from office](#) after her [economic policies](#) exploded in a grievous national humiliation.

Now her predecessor Johnson has been forced to leave parliament.

Even before last night's unprecedented defenestration, the Conservatives looked [doomed to defeat](#) at the next general election. Now one wonders if they can survive at all. Perhaps it's better they don't.

Conservative rule is now synonymous with chaos, cronyism, moral corruption, personal greed and a shocking sense of entitlement. They have inflicted grave damage on the United Kingdom, and as a result, the country's international reputation has never been lower.

Much of Johnson's statement was directed at Prime Minister Rishi Sunak personally, driving a coach and horses through the convention that a former prime minister stays out of the limelight.

Johnson still believes his authority derives from his landslide election, not that he squandered all his popularity in office.

Sunak may be a safe pair of hands, but now he is being challenged by Johnson as a vote winner. He now has three by-elections on his hands to prove it. The latest MP to resign "with immediate effect" is Nigel Adams.

Secondly, one must consider the consequences for Brexit. Johnson was the national leader most personally associated with Brexit, first during the 2016 referendum, and then as the prime minister who sold his policy of "get Brexit done" to the British public in the 2019 general election.

Public opinion had already [moved sharply away](#) from Brexit before last night's ruling by the Privileges Committee obliterated the remains of Johnson's reputation.

With Brexit's champion turned into a national pariah, demand for a return to the European Union will gain fresh momentum.

Brexit is increasingly being [regarded](#) by big business as a huge own goal, the only example where a country imposed economic sanctions on itself. If the US and EU are both investing heavily in their green economy, Britain is seen to be losing out by not doing the same. They lead, we have to follow. The logic of Brexit has been turned on its head.

But the third consequence is more immediate and potentially deadly for Sunak. Just a few hours before announcing that he was standing down, Johnson's [honour's list](#) was published.

The list contains a squalid collection of Johnson cronies. That was only to be expected from the disgraced former prime minister.

But a scandal is brewing over why it was allowed to go through at all.

## King Charles put in impossible position

The choreography of yesterday's events is highly concerning – and suspicious.

The day started with Nadine Dorries – the ardent, dyed-in-the-wool Johnson loyalist tipped for a peerage in the infamous Johnson list of resignation honours – telling Rupert Murdoch's Talk TV that the "last thing" she would want is to resign from parliament and thus spring a by-election in her Bedfordshire constituency.

Five hours later she announced that she had changed her mind and would [stand down](#) as an MP “with immediate effect”.

Asked to explain herself, the former culture secretary [said](#) that “something significant did happen [today] to change my mind”, but would not say what it was.

The most likely assumption is that she received the news of Johnson’s decision to leave parliament from the mouth of Johnson himself.

Dorries’ change of mind is of critical importance because of the early evening news that Sunak had [approved](#) Johnson’s resignation honours list, allowing his former boss to bestow peerages and knighthoods upon dozens of his allies.

Only at 8pm did the bombshell announcement come that the former prime minister had resigned in response to the report of the Commons Privileges Committee.

From the look of things, King Charles has been put in an impossible position. It is all but inconceivable that the King would have approved Johnson’s honour’s list had he known that he had resigned.

So one must assume that in the early evening, when the King approved the list of names, he had no idea that there was an impending announcement from Johnson.

## Johnson drags Sunak into another crisis

Whether Sunak knew of Johnson’s impending resignation before it happened, or whether he did not, Johnson has dragged a Conservative prime minister into his own moral squalor.

Rather like the Russian sappers who reportedly blew up the [Nova Kakhovka dam](#) in southern Ukraine, his exit from parliament wreaks of an ego that screams “Apres moi, le deluge”.

Johnson has impugned the honesty of a parliamentary enquiry, whose committee he himself set up and on whom there is a majority of Tories, including Sir Bernard Jenkin who was a Brexiteer long before Johnson.

He has swung a wrecking ball at Sunak’s claim to have gotten Brexit done. He has challenged what the Conservative Party is about. He has abused the resignation honours list. He has embarrassed the King. Sunak has been exposed as naive and negligent in fulfilling his duty to protect the monarchy from political scandal.

He has forced three by-elections and hinted he could at some point return. Would the party, let alone Sunak, allow him to do so as a Conservative candidate? Is Johnson going to reappear as a Nigel Farage simulacrum on the far right?

Johnson has dragged Sunak into his sordid legacy as prime minister. If he wishes to salvage his reputation, the first step Sunak must take is to scrap Johnson’s honours list.

But also like Putin’s soldiers, Johnson may have blown up quite a lot more of a dam than he intended.

Sunak would be wise to wave Johnson a speedy farewell because that is what the Conservative Party has to do for its own preservation.

Johnson's political career has ended in fireworks. But ultimately it is his judgement and legacy that have gone up in flames.

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*Peter Osborne won best commentary/blogging in both 2022 and 2017, and was also named freelancer of the year in 2016 at the Drum Online Media Awards for articles he wrote for Middle East Eye. He was also named as British Press Awards Columnist of the Year in 2013. He resigned as chief political columnist of the Daily Telegraph in 2015. His latest book is The Fate of Abraham: Why the West is Wrong about Islam, published in May by Simon & Schuster. His previous books include The Triumph of the Political Class, The Rise of Political Lying, Why the West is Wrong about Nuclear Iran and The Assault on Truth: Boris Johnson, Donald Trump and the Emergence of a New Moral Barbarism.*

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