

Johnson Returns to Key Brexit Message as Polls Put Him Ahead

(Bloomberg) — Prime Minister Boris Johnson will go into the final days of the U.K.'s election campaign returning to his key message: that only he can deliver Brexit.

Polls show his Conservative Party on course to win a majority, which would mean Parliament voting to leave the European Union by Jan. 31. But in the 2017 election, those polls were wrong, and Johnson will urge supporters not to be complacent.

On Monday, the prime minister is visiting Sunderland in Northeast England, one of the first places to declare in favor of leaving the European Union on the night of the 2016 referendum. He'll say that vote has been frustrated by members of parliament with "dither and delay, prevarication and procrastination, obfuscation and obstruction," according to his office.

Johnson himself was part of that parliament and a leader of the Conservative rebellion that stopped Britain from leaving the EU in March. But the signs are that voters aren't going to punish him for this in Thursday's election.

Polls in the Sunday newspapers all put the Conservatives in the lead. There were some signs that Jeremy Corbyn's opposition Labour Party was closing the gap, but not by enough yet to keep the Conservatives out of power.

"No one can rule out a surprise, especially after the surprise of 2017, but on the face of it, Johnson is headed for victory," said Anthony Wells of polling firm YouGov. "There's a spread in the polling, but it's between polls that show Johnson getting a big majority, polls that show a medium majority and polls showing it's touch-and-go for a majority."

One possible catalyst for a Tory upset would be if opponents of Brexit manage to persuade people to vote "tactically" for the candidate most likely to defeat the Conservatives. The difficulty is that in tight races, it's not always clear which party that is.

Labour Campaign

Labour, too, will return to its core message, with Treasury spokesman John McDonnell telling voters that the party will put “money in your pockets” and “power in your hands” by increasing government spending and setting up new bodies that will regenerate the U.K. outside London.

But the party is struggling. McDonnell acknowledged on the BBC on Sunday that the emergence of a strain of anti-Semitism in the party under Corbyn’s leadership was hurting Labour in the election. “I worry that this has had its effect,” he said.

Johnson on Sunday strove to brush off issues about his Brexit deal, denying that products traveling between Northern Ireland and Great Britain would need to undergo inspections. “There won’t be checks,” he told Sky News. “There’s no question of there being checks on goods.”

Johnson Sows Confusion Over Northern Irish Trade After Brexit

The prime minister’s campaign message of the final weekend was that he will curtail immigration. Even so, the details of his “Australian-style points-based immigration system” suggest its workings will change little from the U.K.’s existing points-based system.

Both offer a smooth pathway into the country to the highly skilled and the rich and a route to citizenship for those who have skills that are needed. The new plan expands an existing third route for temporary unskilled workers, which is currently restricted because it’s easy for employers to get unskilled workers from the EU.

For its part, Labour said it would introduce free care for all elderly people. It’s an increasing problem in the U.K. that parties have struggled to solve as the cost of looking after an aging population rises.

Liberal Democrat leader Jo Swinson will try to mitigate the damage done by her pledge to simply revoke Brexit — something critics view as undemocratic — by saying her party has legislation drafted for a second referendum. On Sunday, she said that if there’s another hung parliament, she’d be willing to put Labour in power, but not Corbyn.

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