

Australian Political Exchange Council

Individual Study Tour to the United Kingdom – Nathan Quigley

Contents

Executive Summary	2
Governing London	3
The Mayor	3
The London Assembly.....	3
The Boroughs.....	4
2012 London Mayoral Campaign – synopsis	4
Candidates	4
Significant Issues that Unfolded During the Last Month of the Campaign	5
Ken Livingstone’s Tax Affairs	6
Labour Party Election Broadcast	6
Leveson Inquiry	6
Campaign Events	7
Phone Canvassing.....	7
Sky News Debate	7
London Citizens Hustings.....	7
BAME Campaigning	8
Election Day.....	8
Observations Relating to Campaign Strategy.....	9
Broadcast Advertising Bans	9
Expenditure Caps.....	9
Optional Voting	9
Conclusion	10

Executive Summary

From the 9th of April to the 3rd of May 2012, I was attached as an observer to the Boris Johnson re-election campaign for the London Mayoralty. It was an insightful introduction to a number of unfamiliar concepts, including optional voting, broadcast advertisement restrictions, city-wide government and the dynamics of a first term re-election campaign.

Throughout my time in London I was able to discuss the political context and events of the election with key members of the campaign, including Campaign Director Lynton Crosby, Co-Director Mark Fullbrook, Media Director Sam Lyon and Political Director Alex Crowley.

In addition, I had the pleasure of meeting a number of significant players in London politics, including the Mayor's Communications Director, Guto Harri, Assembly Member, James Cleverly, and Deputy Mayor, Kit Malthouse.

Perhaps most interestingly throughout the course of the campaign I was able to spend quite a bit of time on the campaign trail with Boris himself, observing him in action and hearing his thoughts on how the campaign was progressing.

As well as the daily campaign activity, I attended a number of campaign hustings, including the London Citizens Mayoral Husting at the Methodist Central Hall, attended by more than 2,500 people.

I was also lucky enough to secure a place in the studio audience for the Sky News London Mayoral Debate on the 19th of April. This was one of the few chances for the candidates to communicate on their own terms with London TV audiences, and turned out to be a captivating encounter between Johnson and his main rival, Ken Livingstone.

Many people connected with the campaign were extremely generous with their time and knowledge over the course of the month but I must particularly thank CTF partners, who allowed me to observe the campaign and patiently explained campaign strategy and messaging.

Governing London

With almost eight million inhabitants, London is the largest sub-national administrative division in the United Kingdom (UK)– bigger than Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, which all have their own parliaments. It is by far the biggest city in the country, roughly eight times the size of Birmingham, its nearest rival. London also has the fifth largest city economy in the world, and a greater gross domestic product than South Africa.

In recognition of the unique challenges that confront a city of this size, the Greater London Authority (GLA) was created in 2000 to administer public services such as transport and housing across the entire city.

Prior to this time, since the abolition of the Greater London Council in 1986, responsibility for the duties now carried out by the GLA was split between smaller borough councils and the Government.

The Mayor

As the executive head of government in the city of London, the Mayor is the most powerful directly elected official in the UK, responsible for public services that include transport, planning, housing, culture, environment and local economy. The Mayor sets the budget for the GLA and the GLA group, which includes the Metropolitan Police, Transport for London, the London Development Agency and the London Fire Brigade. The consolidated budget of well over £3 billion is roughly one-third funded from the Mayor's share of council tax, with the remainder coming from the UK government in the form of direct grants and redistributed non-domestic rates.

The Mayor appoints a cabinet to assist in the day-to-day administration of the capital, including four Deputy Mayors, one of whom is responsible for policing and another responsible for transport.

The London Assembly

The London Assembly provides oversight for London's executive government. It comprises 25 members elected under a Mixed-Member Proportional system, with 14 members elected from constituencies and a further 11 top-up members elected from party lists.

The Assembly's powers are somewhat limited – it is not a legislative body but rather can wield a power of veto over the Mayor's budget or statutory strategies with a two-thirds majority vote.

The Assembly, through its various committees, also formulates policy and advocates on behalf of the citizens of London to the Mayor and other levels of government in the UK.

Members of the Assembly are sometimes appointed to serve on the Mayor's cabinet. Two Assembly members currently serve as Deputy Mayors, and a further two are Special Appointments to the Cabinet.

In three elections, six parties have achieved representation in the Assembly: Labour, Conservative, Liberal Democrats, The Greens, the United Kingdom Independence Party and the British National Party.

The Boroughs

The 32 boroughs and the City of London are the next level of government below the Greater London Authority. They are responsible for the most local of services, such as roads, schools and waste collection. Borough councillors serve four year terms, and elect a Council Leader from amongst their ranks.

2012 London Mayoral Campaign – synopsis

The 2012 London Mayoral Election took place on the 3rd of May.

Candidates

Boris Johnson - Conservative

Instantly recognisable for his wayward blonde hair, Johnson is a former Conservative MP and journalist. He was first elected in 2008 with a 3.17 per cent margin over Labour Mayor Ken Livingstone, and since that time his celebrity status has only increased. At the time of the 2012 election, Johnson was the most popular political figure in the UK.

Ken Livingstone - Labour

Ken Livingstone was first elected Chairman of the Greater London Council in 1981. His opposition to Margaret Thatcher's Conservative government was considered by many to be a key motivation for the dissolution of the Council in 1986. He was a Labour MP for the Brent East constituency from 1987 until 2001.

When Labour was returned to office in 1997, it set about creating the Greater London Authority, and elections were scheduled for May 2000. In 1999, Livingstone controversially lost Labour pre-selection for the mayoralty and stood as an independent, winning with 58 per cent of the two candidate-preferred vote.

Livingstone applied for readmission to the Labour Party in 2002, but with its official candidate floundering in the polls, he was accepted and endorsed as a unity candidate in 2003. He won re-election comfortably in June 2004 but was defeated by Boris Johnson in 2008.

Brian Paddick – Liberal Democrats

Paddick was also a candidate in 2008, polling just shy of ten per cent for the Liberal Democrats. A former Deputy Assistant Commissioner with the Metropolitan Police, he was the country's most senior gay police officer at the time of his retirement from the service. Since the 2008 election he has appeared on a number of reality TV shows.

Jenny Jones – The Greens

Jenny Jones is a former financial controller and architect who was first elected to the London Assembly on the Greens' ticket in 2000. From 2003-2004 she served as deputy Mayor under Ken Livingstone. This was her first tilt at the mayoralty.

Siobhan Benita - Independent

Mrs Benita is a senior civil servant who resigned her post in 2011 to stand for Lord Mayor. Closest in position to the "New Labour ideology", she describes herself as "definitely on the left".

Other Candidates

Carlos Cortiglia – British National Party.

Lawrence Webb – United Kingdom Independence Party.

Significant Issues that Unfolded During the Last Month of the Campaign

Prior to my arrival, opinion polls had tightened considerably over the winter, leaving the two principal candidates neck-and-neck as we entered 2012. From the first published polls in April, however, Johnson began to develop a lead over his Labour rival. The minor candidates were struggling to make any kind of impact as the campaign developed into a personality contest between Boris Johnson and Ken Livingstone.

Ken Livingstone's Tax Affairs

Since losing the 2008 election Ken Livingstone had been a semi-regular columnist at *The Sun* newspaper. In 2009 he wrote a column attacking people who made arrangements to minimise their tax, implying that there were senior members of the Conservative Party who had done so.

"These rich bastards just don't get it...No one should be allowed to vote in a British election, let alone sit in our Parliament, unless they are paying their full share of tax."

Unfortunately in February of this year, revelations emerged of Livingstone's own complex tax arrangements which his opponents said resulted in him paying a lower rate of tax than his office cleaner. Livingstone continued to deny throughout the campaign that he was not avoiding tax, and the issue continued to dominate the campaign, starving the Labour message of vital oxygen. Although Livingstone released personal tax details on his website, the accounts of the company set up to receive his fees from speaking engagements etc. was never made public, and opponents continued to attack him on the issue right up until polling day.

The issue came to a head on the 3rd of April, when Livingstone accused Johnson - on-air during a joint radio interview – of having the same tax arrangements. After the interview, Livingstone and Johnson were involved in a verbal altercation in front of other candidates.

Labour Party Election Broadcast

The prohibition on broadcast advertisements for elections in the UK means that Party Election Broadcasts are the only way for each candidate to push their message outside of earned media, and they attract far more attention than is the case in Australia.

Ken Livingstone's PEB featured 'ordinary' Londoners discussing what they needed in a Mayor and urging Ken to win the election for them. Livingstone was so moved by the broadcast that he cried as it was launched. Unfortunately news soon broke that a large number of the 'ordinary' Londoners were paid actors. This issue dominated headlines for the first week of my visit and coming on the back of Livingstone's evasiveness over his tax affairs, enabled the Boris Johnson campaign to run strongly on trust in the last month of the campaign.

Leveson Inquiry

The Leveson inquiry into media ethics reached a crescendo in the penultimate week of the campaign, with both James and Rupert Murdoch appearing before the inquiry. At the same time Conservative Culture Secretary Jeremy Hunt was accused of inappropriate dealings

with News Limited in the lead up to the company's bid for full control of the broadcaster BskyB. While this did not impact on the campaign in any meaningful way (with one notable exception – see below), it did dominate media attention and hampered Livingstone's ability to claw back the lead that Boris had opened up since March.

In the last week of the campaign Boris was questioned by the BBC over allegations he had sought sponsorship from News Limited for a cable car and a school in East London. In a windy media conference on the banks of the Thames, Boris dismissed the allegations as "bollocks", possibly a rebellion against the tight messaging that had been the feature of his campaign. The incident caused quite a stir in the campaign office but did not appear to do lasting damage.

Campaign Events

Phone Canvassing

On the evening of the 10th of April I attended a phone bank at Conservative HQ, Millbank. These phone banks were in operation throughout the campaign, with up to 50 volunteers at any one time canvassing voters to build databases and turn out the vote. The two main groups of volunteers I encountered were young professionals on their way home from work and retirees. All were party members, and some campaign staffers travelled over on a nightly basis from the Boris Johnson Campaign Office to help coordinate the phone banks.

Sky News Debate

The Sky News debate in Heron Tower between the three main Mayoral candidates was one of the preeminent events of the campaign. I was fortunate to secure a place in the studio audience to watch the candidates pitch to London voters and answer questions from their constituents. The debate proceeded largely as expected, with Johnson fiercely defending his record and pressing Livingstone on his tax affairs and Livingstone attacking the Mayor over policing numbers. There was speculation that Brian Paddick might enjoy a similar boost to that given to Liberal Democrat Leader Nick Clegg in the general election, due to his being placed on equal footing for the debate with the main candidates, however no evidence for this was present on polling day.

London Citizens Hustings

Amongst the Mayoral hustings I attended was one at the Methodist Central Hall, organised by London Citizens. This is a community organisation, composed mainly of faith groups and religious schools of many different denominations. Unlike moderators at other hustings, the London Citizens moderators were extremely assertive and kept the candidates on topic and

away from their campaign messaging. Despite the fact that most of the concerns raised related to social issues such as the London Living Wage, and that many of those present were from underprivileged neighbourhoods, the moderators were equally tough on all candidates, even giving a generous acknowledgement of the Mayor's previous efforts in regards to the Living Wage. The result was all three mayoral candidates speaking relatively frankly about issues that were not headline issues but important nonetheless. Community organising on this scale is quite a foreign concept to an Australian, and it will be interesting to see how this new movement develops with time.

BAME Campaigning

Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) Londoners make up about one-third of the city's population. Both major campaigns made considerable attempts to engage with these communities, and in particular to drive voter turnout in communities that favoured their respective parties.

I spent about six hours on the 21st of April on board Boris Johnson's campaign bus on a tour organised by the Conservative Friends of Israel, targeting suburbs with significant Jewish populations. The Mayor met publicly with Rabbis, community leaders and Jewish small business owners at a number of locations, and members of the CFI travelled with Boris on the bus, distributing literature to passers-by at each stop.

These were strong conservative suburbs, and supporters had prior warning of Boris' arrival. Consequently the Mayor was mobbed by well wishers and those seeking to have their photo taken with him at every stop, and the campaign team had trouble moving him more than 100 metres at any time.

The following day I was present in Chinatown for a similar event, with Boris meeting senior members of the community whilst supporters distributed campaign material to passers-by. The reception was no less enthusiastic.

Election Day

On polling day I visited the local Conservative Club at Hornchurch to observe the Get Out the Vote campaign. For someone accustomed to election day in Australia, this was an eye-opening experience, with volunteers pounding the streets and knocking on the doors of those identified as likely Conservative voters by the campaign.

Observations Relating to Campaign Strategy

Broadcast Advertising Bans

Political parties in the UK are prohibited from using TV and radio advertising for political campaigning. That means that earned media was particularly important to both sides. Johnson, with his history in television, had a natural advantage when it came to attracting TV news coverage and his campaign activities were usually well publicised. Coupled with the skilful management of the more sympathetic free daily newspapers by the Johnson campaign (the London Evening Standard was particularly friendly towards the Conservatives), this appeared to give Johnson superior reach into the softer portion of the vote in the final month of the campaign. In contrast Livingstone's most favourable press coverage was largely limited to left-leaning national broadsheets such as the Guardian.

Expenditure Caps

Each candidate is limited to spending £420,000 on campaigning, which is an incredibly restrictive cap considering the size of the electorate. This severely limits more expensive voter contact channels such as direct mail. As a result both campaigns made extensive use of volunteers to distribute campaign material to commuters and households (household mail was often personalised and targeted to likely friendly and undecided voters).

Optional Voting

The London experience of optional voting has much to recommend it. Boris Johnson's crossover appeal into a largely left-wing electorate meant that both campaigns were appealing to an engaged, switched-on swinging vote. As a consequence less populist issues such as affordable housing were discussed alongside hip pocket issues such as transport fares. I saw very little evidence, at least from the Conservative side, that extreme positions were being used to turn out the base.

As in 2008, the Conservatives concentrated on voter turnout in outer boroughs such as Richmond, Hillingdon and Havering, whilst Labour worked their traditional support base in the inner boroughs such as Tower Hamlets. The Conservative strategy (dubbed the doughnut strategy in 2008) was not as successful this year, with turnout down significantly in outer boroughs in comparison to the inner city (particularly compared to the large Labour boroughs of Southwark and Lambeth).

However it was not to be enough for Livingstone, who went down to Johnson by a margin of 1.53 per cent. There were dramatic swings against the Conservatives across the city,

resulting in the loss of two Assembly seats (including that of Deputy Mayor Richard Barnes). However Johnson's primary vote outperformed the Conservative Assembly vote by up to 15 per cent in some boroughs, keeping the London Mayor in office for another four years. Crucially, the Conservatives also held onto enough seats to prevent the Assembly from blocking the Mayor's budget.

Conclusion

The London Mayoral election was my first experience of a political campaign outside Australia. It was an invaluable introduction to concepts such as optional voting and broadcast restrictions, as well as an in depth introduction to the governance of one of the premier cities in the world. Perhaps most importantly, I made invaluable contacts with political professionals from the UK and the United States of America, many of whom I have remained in contact with since my return. I would like to thank the Council sincerely for the opportunity to participate in the program.