

## **Boris Johnson wins vote of confidence from Conservative MPs**



Sir Graham Brady announcing vote of Conservative MPs Monday evening

This morning Sir Graham Brady, the chair of the 1922 Committee of Conservative backbenchers in the UK House of Commons, announced that at least 15 percent of the Conservative MPs had written to him requesting a vote of confidence in the leadership of Prime Minister Boris Johnson and that the vote would take place this evening. According to the party rules, at least 15 percent of the MPs – currently 54 – must request such a vote in order for one to be called. Sir Graham said that number had been reached Sunday evening – apparently some had requested that their letter not be opened until the Platinum Jubilee celebrating the Queen’s 70 years on the throne had concluded – and that he had then informed Johnson, who had agreed the vote should be scheduled without delay. The vote, by secret ballot, took place today from 6 to 8 p.m. with the result announced at 9 p.m. Under the party rules, in order to continue as party leader Johnson had to obtain the confidence of at least 50 percent plus 1 of the Conservative MPs. There are currently 359 Conservative MPs, so he had to receive the confidence of at least 180 of them. If he did, he would remain as party leader and hence, given the Conservatives’ majority in the House, prime minister and could not be subjected to another vote of confidence for a year. But if he fell short of 180, the party would conduct an election for a new leader who, upon his or her election as leader, would replace Johnson as prime minister.

The full name of the 1922 Committee is the Conservative Private Members’ Committee. It consists of all Conservative backbench MPs and meets weekly while Parliament is in session. It was founded in 1923 and derives its name from a group of MPs who were elected to the House in 1922, after the coalition government between the Liberals and Conservatives broke down. Several years later, after the 1923 and 1924 elections, all backbench Conservatives were invited and since then all backbench Conservative MPs are by right members. Since 2010, frontbench MPs have an open invitation to all meetings.

That many Conservative MPs no longer have confidence in Johnson's leadership is, of course, not at all surprising. For months, there were allegations of repeated breaches of the Covid guidelines and regulations by Johnson and other officials at #10 Downing St. in 2020 and 2021, all of which were strongly denied by Johnson, but which turned out to be true. "Partygate" became for Johnson almost what "Watergate" became for Richard Nixon. The Metropolitan Police investigated and found that many, including Johnson, had broken the regulations. Indeed, he was fined in one case – the first instance in British history in which a sitting prime minister was fined for breaking the law. A detailed investigation conducted by Sue Gray, the Second Permanent Secretary of the Cabinet Office, found that, "Whatever the initial intent, what took place at many of these gatherings and the way in which they developed was not in line with Covid guidance at the time. Even allowing for the extraordinary pressures officials and advisers were under, the factual findings of this report illustrate some attitudes and behaviours inconsistent with that guidance. It is also clear, from the outcome of the police investigation, that a large number of individuals (83) who attended these events breached Covid regulations and therefore Covid guidance." There were, she said, "failures of leadership and judgment in No 10 and the Cabinet Office. The events that I investigated were attended by leaders in government. Many of these events should not have been allowed to happen. It is also the case that some of the more junior civil servants believed that their involvement in some of these events was permitted given the attendance of senior leaders. The senior leadership at the centre, both political and official, must bear responsibility for this culture."

That so many Conservative MPs have lost confidence in Johnson's leadership is no doubt attributable first and foremost to "Partygate," Johnson's repeated denials of wrong-doing in the House, and the results of the police and Sue Gray investigations. But there are other contributing factors as well, perhaps most notably – and most importantly for the MPs – the poor performance by the Conservatives in the May 5 local elections in England, Scotland, and Wales and the poor prospects for the Conservative candidates in two by-elections that will take place on June 23. In the local elections, Labour added an additional 108 councillors to the number it had prior to the election and won control of five more councils than it had prior to the election. And the Liberal Democrats added 224 councillors to the number it had prior to the election and won control of three more councils than it had prior to the election. In contrast, the Conservatives lost 485 councillors and lost control of 11 councils. The two by-elections are taking place in constituencies the Conservatives won in 2019. In Wakefield in North Yorkshire, which is part of Labour's historic "red wall," Labour has a large lead. And in Tiverton and Honiton in Devon, the Liberal Democrats are likely to win easily as well – in part because Labour has urged its voters to support the Liberal Democrats' candidate. For the Conservative MPs considering Johnson's fate today (and their own in the not-too-distant future), the fact that they suffered a significant setback in the May 5 local elections and are likely to lose both seats in the June 23 by-elections no doubt added to their concerns about Johnson's leadership.

A few minutes after 9 p.m. this evening, Sir Graham announced the vote: 211 MP's voted in favor of confidence in Johnson while 148 voted against. Johnson therefore remains as leader of the party and prime minister. But he does so as a leader who lacks the confidence of more than 40 percent of the Conservative MPs.

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