

6 things we learned from the Tory Leadership Debate

By Bethan Tolley, Communications Officer at the Centre for Brexit Studies

Five men, one job. Last night BBC One played host to their very first Tory Leadership Debate. ‘Our Next Prime Minister’ saw all five remaining contenders – Boris Johnson, Jeremy Hunt, Michael Gove, Sajid Javid and Rory Stewart – battle it out on live TV with a series of questions on various topics from the great British public. Here’s the six things we learned from the debate...

Where do they really stand on Brexit?

Of course, a huge amount of the debate was all about Brexit and if we really will be leaving on the 31st October. Boris Johnson stated on several occasions that the UK will absolutely leave the EU by the 31st October, because otherwise the Conservative party face a “catastrophic loss of confidence in politics.” On the other hand, Jeremy Hunt stated that he would have the UK leave the EU on that date if there was no option of another deal, however, if there was a prospect that we were nearly there, then I would take a bit longer.”.

Michael Gove stated that as he started this (leave campaign) “I will finish it – I will make sure that we leave the European Union in good order”. However, he also agreed with Jeremy Hunt that he would extend if he needed to – but only by a couple of days. Sajid Javid stated that it is fundamental that we leave the EU by the 31st October: “We’ve got to learn from our mistakes. One of the mistakes we’ve had so far is this flexible deadline. If you don’t have a deadline you do not concentrate minds.”

Rory Stewart stated that we need to leave the EU as quickly and efficiently as possible. However, he said that it is not going to be possible to negotiate a new deal with the European Union by the 31st October: “I would save the time, by not wasting the time pretending I was going to negotiate a new deal with Brussels.”

Rory Stewart is well and truly in the race

Looking at the line-up of contenders, it's easy to see that Rory Stewart definitely comes across as, well, the nicest. Unlike his peers who have been caught up in scandals and controversy over the years, Rory simply hasn't – and that's probably why a normal person wouldn't really know a huge amount about him.

He comes across well, seems relaxed (I saw you take your tie off Rory...) and is being honest that he cannot get a new deal negotiated, he's more concerned about getting the deal we already have through parliament. He has come on leaps and bounds in the past week since the voting began, and he's definitely not as popular as Boris, but perhaps this is a name we need to be more aware of in the future.

Jeremy Hunt admitted he went 'too far'

It's a moment none of us saw coming. Jeremy Hunt, known mostly for his Health Secretary days, admitted that the cuts he made to social care "did go too far". He even added that he thinks some local authorities now need more money, even throwing in there that there should be better provision for mental health services. Shocker!

This is more than just Brexit

There were plenty of questions from the public. Of course, a couple of them were all about Brexit. But it is safe to say that the public are thinking about other things other than Brexit.

15 year old Erin, from Glasgow, was frustrated with the contenders about their replies when it came to the environment.

Erin wanted them to promise her that the environment would be their top priority as prime minister, saying: "None of you have impressed me in the way I'm looking for. Climate change isn't an issue of tomorrow, it's an issue of today and we need to create drastic, critical action and I don't think any of you are willing to offer that."

Imam Abdullah Patel asked the MPs about the Islamophobic rhetoric faced by members of his community. Sajid Javid made each member of the panel all agree there and then that to commit to an independent investigation into Islamophobia in the Conservative Party.

No General Election on the horizon

All five contenders claimed that it was too soon to hold a General Election. So if anyone thinks that a new Prime Minister will give the chance of a General Election a boost, they may want to get used to the news that it may be a few years away yet.

No clear winner

As always expected on TV debates, there's bound to be a winner. One that stood head and shoulders above the rest. But with this one, there simply wasn't. In fact, the contenders had to be told to quieten down on more than one occasion, they constantly talked over each other and at times appeared very uncomfortable. So there's no surprise that not many people are particularly happy with how the debate went down, taking to twitter with the hashtag #NotMyPrimeMinister