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# Rebels Leading London: The Mayoralities of Ken Livingstone and Boris Johnson Compared

*This article compares the mayoralities of the first two directly elected Mayors of London, Ken Livingstone and Boris Johnson. The position offers a commanding electoral platform, but weak powers to lead a city regarded as 'ungovernable' (Travers 2004). The two mayors had some obvious points of comparison: both were party rebels, mavericks and skilled media operators. Both also used publicity to make up for weak powers, but courted controversy and faced charges of corruption and cronyism.*

*Utilising Hambleton and Sweeting (2004), this article compares their mayoralities in terms of vision, leadership style and policies. Livingstone had a powerful vision that translated into clear policy aims while Johnson was more cautious, shaped by a desire for higher office. In terms of style, Livingstone built coalitions but proved divisive whereas Johnson retained remarkable levels of popularity. Where Livingstone bought experience and skill, Johnson delegated. In policy terms, the two mayors found themselves pushed by their institutional powers towards transport and planning while struggling with deeper issues such as housing. Livingstone introduced the radical congestion charge and a series of symbolic policies. Johnson was far more modest – championing cycling, the 2012 Olympics and avoiding difficult decisions. The two used their office to negotiate, but also challenge, central government. Livingstone's rebel mayoralty was a platform for personalised change, Johnson's one for personal ambition.*

**Keywords:** Mayors, political leadership, London, comparative, Boris Johnson, Ken Livingstone

Directly-elected mayors were introduced to bring new leadership, accountability and vision to English local government. Since 2000, sixteen elected mayors have been created by referendums across England and in May 2017 a further six new 'metro mayors' were elected to new combined authorities (House of Commons Library 2016). Mayors remain a favoured way of 're-vitalising local government' (Rallings et al 2014, 20; Sweeting 2017).

The reforms sought to create a series of US-style independent actors within the very different structures, settings and resource constraints of English local government (Hambleton and Sweeting 2004; Copus 2004). It was hoped the mayors would govern through a mix of formal powers and 'persuasion and deal-making', drawing power from their status as directly-elected, clearly identifiable leaders (Sweeting 2017, 2-3). The new mayors would 'set goals and persuade, cajole, or convince others to follow', whilst their legitimacy help them to 'overcome resistance' (Hambleton and Sweeting 2004, 481; Leach and Wilson 2000, 49). They could also challenge established party groupings, build wider coalitions and develop new, daring policies (Copus 2004; Elcock and Fenwick 2007). Such 'facilitative leadership' would work through 'cooperation rather than command' and 'consensual participation rather than...formal powers' (Hambleton and Sweeting 2004, 481). The new personality-driven politics would have cross-party appeal, attracting 'politicians with flair and personal appeal' (Hambleton and Sweeting 2004, 485, Centre for Cities 2017).

The UK's reforms reflect the international trend towards having clearly identifiable executive figureheads for large global cities (Acuto 2013; Hambleton 2015a; Sweeting 2017). The reforms are symptomatic of a renewed interest in the role of place-based leadership and how it can mitigate against place-less global forces and drive local political innovation (see Hambleton 2015; Ayres 2014). Though constrained, place-based power can be enlarged to reform and revitalise (Hambleton 2015; Stevens 2013). Beer and Clower (2014) argue such 'leadership tends to be collaborative rather than hierarchical, involving collaboration across institutions, individuals and firms'.

However, there are drawbacks. Independent local leaders are often prey to corruption and may not necessarily revitalise democracy (Elcock and Fenwick 2007). Reforms frequently leave 'unfinished business' between the locality and the centre (Copus et al 2016, 301; Budd and Sancino 2016). In the UK mayors are neither a 'radical departure' nor a 'repackaging' of current arrangements but a 'typically English compromise' between 'the need to change' and central and local elites' desire 'not to change too much' (Copus 2011, 45).

Nevertheless, academics broadly agree that the new UK mayors have generated 'facilitative local leadership' (Fenwick and Elcock 2014, 596; Gains et al 2007). Greasley and Stoker (2008, 728) found that 'their greater decision-making authority and fewer veto constraints...have provided more visible and high-profile leadership', that is more 'partnership-based, open, and less partisan'. Such high-visibility leadership is 'evidence of an ability to get things done' and an antidote to 'the managerialisation of urban politics' (Sweeting and Hambleton 2015, 16). However, the new mayors have had to move between being a 'civic, political and corporate leader', and use their 'influence and persuade' due to limited powers and constitutional weakness (Copus 2009, 25-26). They have varied in their party relationship from *party-detached* to *party-loyalist* (Copus 2013, 66). Some are 'drawn away from the certainties of adversarial party politics and from political ideology' whilst others follow party lines (Copus 2011, 348). Some mayors have 'carved out a distinct approach' whilst others were left 'struggling with the limitations of their office and a hostile political environment' (Copus 2009, 44-45). Rather than being all powerful local leaders, there is a 'much more nuanced reality' (Sweeting 2017, 2-3).

It was hoped that mayors would 'spark a blaze of interest' in local politics (Copus 2009, 25). Dommett and Flinders (2014) argue that successive governments created an 'expectations vacuum' by failing to make the case for mayors (39). There has been no 'popular excitement', as judged by local turnout or participation across mayoral elections (Fenwick and Elcock 2014, 596). Turnout in London Mayoral contests reached 46% in 2008 and again in 2016 from low base and, in May 2017

ranged from twenty-one percent in the Tees Valley to twenty-nine percent in Greater Manchester for the six new combined-authority mayoralities (Blick and Dunleavy 2017; Blakeley and Evans 2017).

Hambleton and Sweeting (2004) suggest that comparisons of local leadership should explore the policy environment, institutional arrangements and leader-follower relations. Adapting this approach, this article presents a more agent-centred evaluation to reflect the emphasis on the capacity of the office-holders. We consider each mayor in terms of:

1. Mandate and Vision (goals and electoral support)
2. Leadership style (method and governance approach)
3. Policies and use of institutional powers (policies implemented or pursued and related use of powers)

Before utilising this thematic comparison, we present the necessary institutional background to London governance, a brief analysis of the incumbents and an explanation of the comparative method used.

### **The Mayor of London: Governing the Ungovernable City?**

Travers characterised London as ungovernable (2004). As a global city in constant change, it faces a complex and rapidly-fluctuating demographic, pressurised and aging services, congestion, poor infrastructure and a historic lack of investment in almost all essential services (from housing to health and education) (Travers 2004, 2015; Whitehead 2010). This has been compounded by almost constant political flux. In the last 30 years London has experimented with four systems of government, including the Greater London Council (GLC) until 1986 and a formal grouping of local authorities during the 1990s (Travers 2004; Syrett 2006). By 2000, London's governance system was complex and fragmented, with power divided between 32 boroughs (municipal local authorities) and central government, who control the vast part of London's finance. The new Mayor was introduced into a 'seething and chaotic system.' (Travers 2004, xii).

The Greater London Authority (GLA) was created by the 1999 Greater London Authority Act, the longest piece of legislation in post-war history (Wilson and Game 2011). It was designed to provide London-wide government, without handing too much power to a single figure who could use it as a platform against central government (Wilson and Game 2011). The Act created a US-style mayoral system with a directly-elected mayor of London and a 25-member London Assembly, with a formal separation of powers between the executive (the mayor), and the scrutinising legislature (the Assembly) (Sweeting 2003). The GLA governed via four bodies: Transport for London, the Metropolitan Police Authority (MPA), London Fire and Emergency Planning (LFEP) and the London Development Agency (LDA), though these governing arrangements underwent change (Wilson and Game 2011).

In terms of their power, the 1999 Act gave the Mayor of London the authority and legitimacy of direct election and the prestige of governing London. In another US parallel, the mayor could make extensive '(non-merit) political adviser appointments' that the Assembly could not block (Sweeting 2003, 471). Any other direct powers were 'modest' (Wilson and Game 2011, 74). Policy would be primarily made via mayoral strategies 'relating to transport, spatial development, biodiversity, air quality, municipal waste, culture...and economic development and regeneration' (Sweeting 2003, 471). Financially, the Mayor of London controlled far less than their Parisian or New York counterparts, being 'squashed' between jealously-guarded central government funding and borough budgets (Travers 2004).

**The mayor was empowered by a weak assembly. The Assembly was a much weaker body from its inception, based, as Travers remarked, on an uneasy compromise between Westminster ideas and a 'pure American system'(HC213, 2013, 12). Envisaged as having a primarily post-event scrutinising role, it lacked the power to create legislation or to alter mayoral policy and strategies (Sweeting, 2003). Whilst public scrutiny is certainly possible, with set piece events such as mayor's questions, the institution has substantially less power and authority in comparison with the Mayor. A 2013**

**report by the House of Commons Communities and Local Government Select Committee, while the mayor gained additional powers in 2007 and 2011, the Assembly had not and the committee concluded that ‘the result is a dog's breakfast of responsibilities, with the Assembly lacking a clear role and understandable powers’ concluding that ‘the current arrangements are neither explicable to the general public nor can the London model be used in the rest of the country’(HC213). The committee recommended that the Assembly be given a moderate expansion of its powers, with a requirement for the Mayor to publish a strategic forward plan and the Assembly having the capacity to then call in mayoral decisions, creating a more formal separation between the two bodies (HC213, 2013). The Government rejected the call for greater powers, arguing it would ‘undermine the approach taken in London of having a strong mayoral model with after-the-event scrutiny by the Assembly’ (HMG, 2013:3).**

The mayor would thus be both strong and weak, facing weak scrutiny but relatively disempowered in London governance overall (Sweeting 2002, 17). The ‘constraints [would] fundamentally limit the scope and scale of action’ on vital areas over ‘housing, education and schools’ (Syrett 2006, 306). The mayor’s uneasy position would be a recipe for conflict upwards to central government and downwards to the boroughs. Sweeting (2003, 476) predicted ‘future relations...were likely to be characterised by rows about powers and finance, but would have deeper roots in the location of political sovereignty over the capital’.

Although institutionally weak, the mayor had four potential sources of power. First, the authority and profile of the office (Sweeting 2003, 476). Second, the legitimacy of mandate stemming from the third-largest mandate for a directly-elected politician in Europe – after the Presidents of France and Portugal, respectively (Copus 2013; Sweeting 2003, 476; Financial Times 2016a). Third, a consensual collaborative style could produce policy results. The mayor was created amid a shift ‘from networked governance without a centre to network governance with a weak centre’ with the

expectation that a conciliatory and persuasive local leader could provide vital links (Kleinmann et al., 2002 in Syrett 2006, 300). Mayoral 'persuasion and bargaining' could help unite partners over policy and obtain central government funding (Travers and Whitehead 2010). Fourth, the mayor could, over time, bargain for greater powers. Both Mayors did gain greater power over strategic planning, waste and housing given in 2007 and again in 2011 over policing when the MPA was replaced by the Mayor's Office for Policing and Crime (MOPC). In 2012 City Hall acquired the powers of the London Development Agency and became responsible for the Olympic legacy. Successive governments have, however, resisted ceding greater taxation powers to London (London Finance Commission 2013).

### **'Ken' and 'Boris' 2000-2016**

The parallels between Ken Livingstone and Boris Johnson are compelling at first glance (Edwards and Isaby 2008). Both fitted the mould of a more Americanized local leader, as politicians 'with flair and personal appeal' (Hambleton and Sweeting 2004, 485). Both Johnson and Livingstone were 'overly candid political maverick(s)' and party rebels, with unorthodox views and popular reaches that often crossed party lines (Edwards and Isaby 2008, 44). They positioned themselves as outsiders running against their party. **In Livingstone's case, his outsider status was such that he ran and governed as an independent 2000-2004 against the party he represented since the 1970s. Such an appeal helped especially when Livingstone's tenure was (partly) aligned to a Labour government and Johnson, from 2010, governed with a Conservative-led government in power.**

Each had highly-attuned media skills and, as 'Ken' and 'Boris', were two of the few British politicians to be known by their first names (Edwards and Isaby 2008). Their spontaneous approaches created almost personal, emotive connections with audiences – a 'flirtation' with their electorates (Wood et al 2016, 592; Yates 2010). Consequently, they could court approval and support that more conventional politicians could not (Carvel 1984: Wood et al 2016, 590). Their two genial and maverick exteriors also concealed a level of political ruthlessness (Carvel 1984; Gimson 2016).

Such parallels, however, mask deep differences. Partly the distinction is between the celebrity *politician* (Ken Livingstone) and the *celebrity* politician (Boris Johnson) (Wood et al 2016, 584). Livingstone made his name from political notoriety when leading the GLC in the 1980s, buoyed by a hostile media that he cleverly manipulated (Carvel 1984). Johnson image was less politicised and more celebrity-orientated: his status was acquired through his journalism and appearances on the current affairs panel show *Have I Got News For You*. While Livingstone was a politician who was also a gifted media performer, Johnson resembled more an 'Everyday Political Celebrity' (Wood et al 2016). The 'Everyday Political Celebrity' is a spontaneous and gaffe-prone figure, using non-traditional two-way media to appear inevitably flawed, but equally authentic, rooting their allure in radicalism and an anti-establishment appeal: Johnson is of a type that also include Sarah Palin, Beppe Grillo and Nigel Farage (Wood et al 2016, 586).

The key distinction was that Livingstone's media skills served his radical politics: he possessed clear policy orientations and transparent goals, some of which were both controversial and deeply unpopular (Carvel 1984). Johnson's approach was closely tied to personal ambition (Purnell 2012; Gimson 2016). The two also had strikingly opposite backgrounds. Livingstone was a comprehensive school-educated Londoner, who never attended university but was deeply involved in London Labour politics from the early 1970s (Livingstone 2011). Having spent time in housing authorities committees, Livingstone was elected as a member of the GLC in 1973, leading it between 1981 and 1986. He was later MP for Brent East from 1987 to 2000 and was a member of the left-wing Socialist Campaign Group (Livingstone, 2011). Johnson was a far less-likely candidate for outsider or rebel status. Though 'contrary to popular perception, Johnson did not enjoy an entirely gilded youth' he attended Eton and then Oxford where he joined the infamous Bullingdon Club (Fletcher 2017: Wood et al 2016; Dommett 2015). As a *Daily Telegraph* journalist in Brussels, he championed Euroscepticism before becoming MP for Henley from 2001 to 2008. He was briefly Shadow Minister for the Arts (2003-2004) before being sacked for lying over an extra-marital affair before returning as Shadow Minister for Higher Education (2005-2007). (Gimson 2016) With limited political experience

and few genuine parliamentary supporters, Johnson essentially made his name on television (Grimson 2016; Wood et al 2016).

Comparing the two mayoralties, it is *differences* rather than *similarities* that account for their varied trajectories. Adapting Hambleton and Sweeting's (2004) approach, Livingstone brought vision and experience, whilst polarising support and creating controversies that eventually undid him. Johnson proved less visionary and more headline-grabbing, whilst more cautious in policy terms, with one eye on his future career. Livingstone wished to lead London while for Johnson 'the role of mayor was Boris's audition for the top job. His aim was to establish himself as prime minister-in-waiting' (Fletcher 2017).

### **Measuring the London Mayoralty**

Measuring the first two mayoral incumbents (over four consecutive terms) offers several convenient points of departure, but also some challenges. The governing context of the two leaders was broadly-similar. Their shared approach was to promote London as a global city and support the pro-market business environment that had fuelled the city's boom from the late 1980s onwards (Syrett 2006). They also inherited a series of systemic problems. Foremost was London's housing crisis, triggered by varied factors over which the mayor had little, if any, control: an increasing populations low infrastructure investment and the impact of central government housing policies (*Prospect* 2016; *Financial Times* 2016a). Both also struggled with persistent problems such as London's knife crime epidemic (Squires 2009).

The two mayors, limited by the constraints of the office, tilted towards certain policy areas, notably transport and planning, and followed an institutional drift towards grand projects. Carmona (2012) notes their approach to planning bore remarkable similarities. Both also maximised their US-style powers over appointment and patronage, creating what Livingstone called a 'Kenocracy' or 'Borisocracy' of advisors and deputies (Hoskyns 2008). The two mayors benefited from increasing formal extension of their powers, but pushed at the limits of their influence through 'mission creep'

and publicity (Pimlott and Rao 2004, 173). There were also public rows with central government over policy, resources and powers. Some of these rows were contrived positioning, but others marked points of real conflict.

Measuring the two is problematic in other ways. Livingstone was an independent, choosing to run against the official Labour Party candidate Frank Dobson, before returning as a Labour mayor from 2004-2008. Johnson, however, was always a Conservative. Institutionally, the London mayoralty was built from scratch by Livingstone, who 'lost' two years doing so (2011) whereas Johnson inherited an established and embedded system. There is also the challenge of attributing and tracing the roots of policy initiatives. For example, Johnson's 'Boris Bikes' cycle-hire scheme originated with Livingstone while Johnson reaped the political benefit of the 2012 London Olympics, hard fought for by Tony Blair and Livingstone in 2005. Other large-scale planning projects and problems crossed over between mayoralties.

In applying a comparative analytical framework, this article is framed by the continuing public and academic debate over the expansion of directly-elected mayors in England (see Fenwick and Elcock 2014; Sweeting 2017; Copus 2009). It draws on publicly available assessments of both mayoralties (see Sweeting 2002; Travers 2008) academic analysis of particular policies (see Leape 2006) and opinion polling (YouGov 2016). It also uses biographical works regarding Livingstone (see Carvel 1984, 1999; Hosken 2008; Livingstone 2011) and Johnson (see Purnell 2012; Gimson 2016).

### **Ken Livingstone 2000-2008**

Livingstone, forever rendered as 'Red Ken', was synonymous with the London of the 1980s. He carried a divisive reputation as either a left-wing 'folk' hero or extremist symbol of the so-called 'Loony Left'. Livingstone led the GLC between 1981 and 1986, seizing control of it the day after the election, when he carried out a coup against the victorious Labour leader (see Carvel 1984; Hosken 2008). The GLC became a platform for a wider range of causes and he co-operated with a range of left and centre groups – supporting gay rights, anti-racism and negotiating with Sinn Fein (Pimlott

and Nao 2004, 33-34). He also championed cheap transportation and fare freezes that culminated in a controversial High Court battle that Livingstone lost. Some saw him as the head of left-wing local government opposition to Thatcher, symbolised by a banner over city hall bearing London's unemployment figures. Others saw the GLC as a platform for 'gesture politics and extremism' and Livingstone came under powerful attacks from right-wing media (Pimlott and Nao 2004, 34). He was described by *The Sun* newspaper in 1982 as the 'most odious man in Britain', but came second in the BBC's Person of the Year poll after the Pope (Carvel 1984).

Described as a maverick who 'wears the mantle of the outsider', Livingstone was a 'articulate and witty populist' with a 'flair for publicity and a relaxed public persona' (Carvel 1984, 231; Pimlott and Nao 2004, 34). For all his radicalism, Livingstone was also an assiduous coalition builder, frequently working across party lines (Pimlott and Nao 2004; Livingstone 2011). Carvel (1984, 230) spoke of Livingstone, like Thatcher, as an 'instinctive politician' yet warned of a 'sharp contrast between style and content of his policies' as his 'populist style' concealed 'radical evangelist policy' that 'persistently proved unpopular with the electorate' (235).

After the GLC was abolished in 1986, Livingstone remained a party rebel. Livingstone's was the name most mentioned when, in 1997, Labour put forward proposals for a mayor but his path to victory in the London mayoralty election in 2000 was controversial. Blair and others, fearing a return to policies that they believed cast Labour into the electoral wilderness of the 1980s, began a 'bitter and cynically manipulated' internal selection process with the 'sole objective...to stop Livingstone at all costs' (Wilson and Game 2011, 74). Livingstone's Labour candidacy was blocked and he thus ran and won as an independent in 2000.

### **Boris Johnson 2008-2016**

Johnson's path to the mayoralty was very different to Livingstone's (Flinders 2016; Gimson 2016). He had no local government background and was the Tories' last-ditch candidate (Holman and Thornley 2011). Though reluctant to give up his safe parliamentary seat in Henley, a combination of ambition

and lack of promotion in the Conservative Shadow Cabinet persuaded him to try (Gimson 2016). Johnson's popularity was rooted in his celebrity appeal as a jester, though Livingstone quickly saw him as a serious threat (Crines 2013). His political approach mixed nostalgic views of an English past and 'retro masculinity' with a post-modern, PR-driven flirtation (Yates 2010). His vague philosophy was, at best, a brand of 'Merry England conservatism' (Gimson 2016, 299). Though his style was an 'affront to serious people's idea of how politics should be conducted' his 'genuine bogusness' held wide appeal and shamelessness was the key to his success in 2008 and 2012 (Gimson 2016).

### **Mandate and Vision**

#### *Livingstone: Trotsky and Thatcher?*

Livingstone had a clear, radical, vision for London in 2000. His focus was on the three key areas of inequality, the environment and regeneration-issues that the mayor's limited power, at least initially, did not wholly cover. A number of these themes had been pursued at the GLC – including reduced public transport costs, housing and symbolic moves on gay rights (Livingstone, 2011). This was bound within a 'policy direction that would consolidate London's new position as a major world city' and Livingstone's own vision 'of a multiracial, multicultural metropolis' (Johnson 2008, 434). Back in the party fold as Labour's 2004 candidate, his second term approach was more moderate emphasising affordable housing, extending the congestion charge and climate change (Travers and Whitehead 2010; Johnson 2008, 434). Livingstone's London plans, rooted in a vision weaving themes of social equality and environmental protection together, offered a 'radical strategic approach' with strong guidance to boroughs (Holman and Thornley 2011). For all his supposed left-wing views, Livingstone firmly embraced the free market boom driving London's expansion and was described as a mixture of Trotsky and Thatcher (Purnell 2012). It was his failure to find a new narrative that explained his electoral losses to Johnson in 2008 and 2012 (see Crines 2013).

London is often characterised as an electoral doughnut with a red (Labour) core and a blue (Conservative) periphery and Livingstone's mandate was portrayed as primarily 'inner city based'.

While this characterisation is rather crude, it is true is that Livingstone governed with a lopsided mandate – an electoral coalition between London’s poor and its middle-class tube users (*Huffington Post* 2017). In a repeat of his time at the GLC, in polling terms he also proved controversial and divisive as mayor – the number of Londoners either satisfied or dissatisfied increased during his tenure.

Table 1 here

Livingstone thus had a very different trajectory of popularity from Johnson. He came across as controversial and authoritarian, partly because of his ambitious agenda and policy choices and partly due to his combative personality (Yates 2010). Livingstone also faced a sceptical and sometimes hostile media, wading into damaging rows with London’s main newspaper, the *Evening Standard*, from 2005 onwards (Hosken 2008). This culminated in Livingstone receiving a month-long suspension from office after likening a Jewish *Evening Standard* reporter to a concentration camp guard in his second term. Livingstone’s ‘Kenocracy’ led to continuous corruption allegations (most notably involving Lee Jasper) and, eventually, a barrage of negative stories over ‘allegations of cronyism’ that distracted his mayoralty (Johnson 2008, 480).

#### *Johnson: post-ideological populism*

Johnson’s unexpected victory in 2008, in a perceived Labour city, meant he faced a different, and lower, set of expectations than Livingstone. For all his bluster, Johnson’s mayoralty was safety-first and his aim was to keep London running, especially during the 2012 Olympics, and not make any serious mistakes (Gimson 2016). Given his self-created brand power some, including erstwhile ally Michael Gove, questioned Johnson’s willingness and ability to make tough decisions (Shipman 2016). Unlike his predecessor, Johnson had no particular ‘philosophy’ or ‘core’ ideals (Purnell 2012). His

cultivated image drew on a 'very traditional English trait of refusing to commit and take things too seriously' and he governed as a 'post-ideological politician' (Yates 2010, 34).

As a result, Johnson assumed office with fewer concrete plans or signature issues than Livingstone, with a commitments to abolish the Western extension of the congestion charge, lower Council Tax and tackle crime (Purnell 2012). There were also eye-catching doses of 'pragmatic populism' over cycling and reverting back to routemaster buses and his tenure was peppered with symbolic changes – such as banning alcohol on the Underground (Holman and Thornley 2011). Johnson also championed local autonomy and less interference by the mayoralty with the boroughs (Holman and Thornley 2015). Johnson's Conservatism was, however, 'elastic and ambiguous'. He defend bankers and called for an EU referendum from 2009 onwards, while taking a liberal stance on immigration and opposing the government over housing relocation (which he famously termed 'Kosovo style cleansing') (Purnell 2012). The contrast in visions was exposed in the very different strategic plans: while Livingstone's London plan 'strode ahead with a strategic vision' Johnson's 2011 replacement 'shuffled along in pragmatism', adopting a looser approach (Holman and Thornley 2011, 145). Holman and Thornley (2011, 145) argued that this switch in style meant a loss in strategic planning and leadership for London.

Johnson's everyday celebrity appeal fuelled his popularity ratings in London, which stayed consistently high during his time as mayor and outstripped Prime Minister David Cameron's. Johnson was a charismatic mayor with unique cross-party appeal: 'Britain's Heineken politician: refreshing parts of the public that other politicians can't reach' (Wood et al 2016, 590). Polling in 2012 found his (hypothetical) presence as Conservative leader would add a 6-point lead in a general election (Dommett 2015; YouGov 2016). Johnson's only real 'danger moment' came in 2011, with a series of riots across London. His apparent refusal to return from holiday was widely criticised and his public appearances were booed. Johnson partly deflected blame by wielding a broom in a series of

'spontaneous' events and engineering an argument over policing with Home Secretary Theresa May (Gimson 2016).

Politically, Johnson's key achievement was electoral; to win a Labour city twice. His success rested on the opposite electoral base from Livingstone's, drawing on the outer 'Blue' London, though Johnson's 2012 win was close as the demographics shifted (Holman and Thornley 2015). The media were more supportive of Johnson than Livingstone and gave prominence to his photo opportunities. The *Evening Standard* consistently supported him and Johnson ally reporter Andrew Gilligan, one of Livingstone's fiercest critics, was later appointed Cycling Commissioner (Johnson 2008). Johnson also proved adept at using social media and interactive communication tools to sell his personalised brand (Wood et al 2016; Crines 2013).

As with Livingstone, Johnson suffered a series of distractions. His two terms and his entire mayoralty were, in some senses, preparation to fulfil his ambitions for higher office (and become prime minister). Johnson also faced charges of disinterest and being a 'part-time' mayor as his search for a parliamentary seat became obvious from 2013 onwards (Purnell 2012; Gimson 2016). His second term was dominated by speculation in the media as to whether Johnson would seek out a seat and, despite his denials, he eventually did so, becoming MP for Uxbridge & Ruislip in May 2015. His ambitions clearly stretched beyond the mayoralty as, from 2012 onwards, Johnson put together a team to help him win the Conservative leadership and, perhaps as measure of his disinterest in London, he even offered to lead Cameron's post-2015 EU renegotiations (Shipman 2016).

## **Leadership Style**

### *Livingston: patronage and publicity*

In his first term Livingstone was forced to take exactly the kind of conciliatory approach envisioned by supporters of the new mayoral model: as an independent he had 'no choice but to create a new politics based on coalitions' (Pimlott and Nao 2004, 163). He used patronage powers to appoint both

Labour and Liberal Democrat advisors and build alliances with Green and Labour GLA members, an approach that had the added advantage of neutralising opponents (Livingstone 2011; Pimlott and Nao 2004). Livingstone drew on past experience to appoint an advisory team from his GLC days; he claimed that they had 152 years of London governing between them (Livingstone 2011). Livingstone drew on his own 'lifelong attachment' to London and long 'knowledge of local government' (Holman and Thornley 2011, 145). He was described by his Labour deputy, Nicky Gavron, as having a mastery of detail and being the consummate technician and delegator, with an intimate understanding of the city (Hosken 2008).

As with the GLC, Livingstone proved 'adept at using publicity to his advantage' to highlight issues and push policies (Sweeting 2003, 476). However, his approach often provoked controversy and opposition and his coalition-building did not extend beyond his own administration. He fell out with the leaders of the 32 boroughs in 2001, seeking to circumvent their co-ordinating body while provoking Conservative councils over the congestion charge and affordable housing targets (Pimlott and Nao 2004). He also used his mayoral powers to impose different views onto the boroughs over residential densities, housing allocations, waste regulation and tall buildings (especially once his planning powers were extended from a veto to an override in 2007) (Gordon and Travers 2010). By the end of his mayoralty, he had developed a tense and combative relationship with other parts of London government (Holman and Thornley 2011). His high-handed, conflictual, approach gave Johnson opportunities to craft himself as a 'hands off' mayor who would return power to the overruled boroughs.

#### *Boris: charisma and delegation*

As mayor, Johnson was 'long on charisma and short on detail' (*Financial Times* 2016). As an 'Everyday Celebrity' Johnson constantly chased spontaneous events and opportunities and made headlines insulting various groups (Dommett 2015). His approach was 'one of seeking publicity with a range of *ad-hoc* statements and schemes' (Yates 2012, 34). His mayoralty was, in essence, a series

of media opportunities epitomised by his participation in a 2011 police drugs raid, when the suspect greeted his appearance with the question ““what the f\*\*k are you doing here?”” (Gimson 2016, 347). Johnson made the most of a series of fortunate public relations events, such as the Olympics and Diamond Jubilee. The 2012 Olympics was the high-water mark of Johnson’s ‘postmodern methods of political communication’ and ‘the televised spectacle of the 2012 Olympic Games provided the perfect *mise en scène* for Johnson to perform his schtick to full effect’ (Yates 2012, 34). Johnson proved, however, much less able to deal with direct questions from the media or sustained scrutiny from the GLA, which he had little time for (Dommett 2015).

Beyond the photo opportunities and image management, Johnson was far less experienced in terms of governing than Livingstone. He delegated policy and coalition-building to a series of deputy mayors and experienced chiefs of staff, including Simon Milton and Eddie Lister, who ‘both won the respect of the mainly Labour borough councils’ (*Independent* 2016). He surrounded himself with competent people in other areas, such as former BBC journalist Guto Harri (who managed his communications) (Gimson 2016). Johnson created a ‘Borisocracy’ of appointed advisors and political appointees at City Hall. As with Livingstone, charges of corruption and cronyism followed and Johnson lost three deputy mayors in one year, due to revelations and expenses scandals (Gimson 2016). Controversy also grew over some of his more grandiose planning projects, including the ill-fated Garden Bridge project.

### **Policies and use of Institutional Powers**

#### *Livingstone: congestion and beyond*

Livingstone’s championing of a central London congestion charge was the centrepiece of his mayoralty (Livingstone 2011). Past efforts to instigate British road charges had ‘historically encountered fierce political resistance’ and experts saw it as ‘foolhardy’ (Leape 2006, 173). Such policies were regarded as economically desirable, but socially unacceptable and politically suicidal (Mackie 2005). Livingstone initially intended the charge to be a relatively small experiment and faced

powerful opposition from the media and lobby groups, who predicted disaster, and scepticism from the government who were reportedly preparing strategies to distance themselves from it (Livingstone 2011). Reflecting later on the risk, he worried that failure would end his career (Livingstone 2011).

However, when introduced in 2003 the charge proved 'a practical success in reducing congestion' (Leape 2006, 173). More importantly, 'political opposition to the scheme' was 'minimal and popular support...widespread' – in part, Livingstone claimed, because of extensive advance consultation and persuasion (Leape 2006, 173; Livingstone 2004). A more muted picture emerges from analysis of the scheme's social costs and benefits, especially as it cost twice the estimate (BBC 2013). Nevertheless 'there is a degree of public and professional consensus...that the London congestion charging scheme has been a rare transport policy success in an otherwise rather bleak picture.' (Mackie 2005, 288). Livingstone himself felt 'overall, the scheme [was] a success and ... worked better than I hoped' (Livingstone 2004, 296). In 2007, the Western extension saw the charge rolled out to include parts of Westminster and the Royal Borough of Kensington & Chelsea, doubling the population covered. Even Johnson, who scaled-back the extension in 2011, agreed that overall the scheme was a success (BBC 2013).

Transport was perhaps the area where Livingstone made an obvious difference, introducing capped fares (echoing the Fares Fair GLC policy), electronic Oyster travel cards and beginning London's Crossrail system. There were significant increases in the number of buses and a relative fall in bus fares, made possible with extra government funding (Syrett 2006).

Housing, one of London's core intractable problems, proved more difficult as the mayor had less policy influence and formal control (Whitehead 2010). Livingstone set (but missed) an ambitious 50% affordable housing target. He also named and shamed those (mainly Tory) boroughs he felt were not co-operating (Kenworthy 2015; *Evening Standard* 2007). Livingstone used his planning powers to regenerate green areas with the '100 Spaces project' that, though it also fell short of its

targets, was seen as ambitious and radical. For Livingstone, such grand projects were sometimes a means to other ends – for example, winning the 2012 London Olympics was exploited as an opportunity to regenerate East London.

Livingstone pushed the boundaries of mayoral power, using the oxygen of publicity to highlight areas over which he had little formal power such as child poverty, gender wage inequality and minimum wage levels (Syrett 2006, 305). He used his platform to push policies designed to forge progressive change by, for example, promoting civil partnerships through the London Partnership Register (2001). Livingstone also created a global series of London embassies (inevitably nicknamed ‘kenbassies’ by the media); struck a fuel deal with Chavez’s Venezuela and attacked non-congestion charge paying embassies (branding the US ambassador a ‘chiselling crook’ for his avoidance). He proved adept at crisis management and his response to the 7/7 bombing, both in his Churchillian speech and pledge to keep the Tube running (travelling to work himself on the Underground the next day), were widely praised.

Predictably, clashes with central government were common. The New Labour government initially greeted Livingstone’s 2000 election with a combination of ‘sulky hauteur, dark suspicion and realpolitik’ (Pimlott and Nao 2004, 164). Livingstone fought the government in the courts over Transport for London’s financing where it was widely ‘acknowledged that Livingstone ‘won’ the public debate regarding tube financing, yet the courts ruled in the government’s favour’ (Sweeting 2003, 476). He was an outspoken supporter of transport strikes and a constant critical of the government’s foreign policies, particularly the Iraq War in 2003. Nevertheless, he was re-admitted into the Labour party and worked closely with Blair in 2005 winning London’s bid to host the 2012 Olympics. He proved adept in negotiations with central government and secured funding not only for the congestion charge, but for a series of large-scale transport improvements and, eventually, greater powers (Travers and Whitehead 2010).

*Johnson: grand quixotic projects*

Johnson presented himself as a politician who would ‘sketch daring enterprises and fill in the detail later’ (Gimson 2016). However, his mayoralty was marked by caution, restrained by his future ambitions. Johnson’s most serious flexing of institutional power came early, in 2008, when he sacked the Metropolitan Police Commissioner Iain Blair after a string of controversies. Although he did not have the power to do so, Johnson orchestrated a media campaign to make the Commissioner’s position untenable (Purnell 2012). Travers (2016) argued that ‘having been attacked by his opponents before taking office for being incompetent and unprepared, his period in office [was] surprisingly normal’. Modest though his policy aims were, Johnson’s most eye-catching initiative (albeit one inherited from his predecessor) was his ‘Boris Bikes’ bike-hire scheme followed by his role on delivering the Olympics and the London Living Wage (see Table 2). Perhaps as a reflection of his modest aims, more than 1 in 10 people felt Johnson had no policy legacy at all (YouGov 2016).

Insert Table 2 here

Despite his promises of (re-)empowering boroughs, Johnson’s Outer London Commission lost momentum, with a brief re-boot in his second term. Like Livingstone, Johnson also attempted to solve London’s growing housing crisis and succeeded in building more affordable homes than Livingstone (in part because he loosened the definition of what constituted affordable) (Holman and Thornley 2015; Kenworthy 2015; Financial Times 2016a). It was widely felt Johnson lacked the political will to do more. Despite championing targeted ‘housing zones’, he refused to criticise government policy and undermined his own targets by allowing building projects with too few affordable proportions (*Prospect* 2016; *Financial Times* 2016a). With greater institutional power over housing policy, Johnson turned what was a ‘problem’ under Livingstone into a ‘crisis’ by the end of his mayoralty (Whitehead 2010).

The two London mayors ‘played a significant role’ in a ‘growing culture of concern for urban design in London’ (Carmona 2012, 42). Although Johnson promised to protect London’s ‘precious skyline’

and attacked the featureless and 'phallographic' towers Livingstone authorised, he gravitated towards facilitating further planning projects. While Livingstone gave permission to 27 tall buildings across London Johnson authorised 437, and sided with developers on all 14 occasions that he adjudicated (*BDonline* 2016). He undid Livingstone's 100 Spaces project, strongly criticising it as 'a Zone 1 [i.e. inner London] plan' and claimed there should be 'overriding emphasis...on leafy outer London' (Carmona 2012, 39). However, Johnson's later own spaces initiative seemed 'remarkably similar to Livingstone's' (Carmona 2012, 40).

Like his predecessor, Johnson pushed grand projects and headline-grabbing ideas, from cable-cars to new buildings. He displayed a 'quixotic tendency' to pursue several grand projects that failed to come to fruition, from the redevelopment of London's ports to the re-design of the Olympic Park (*Financial Times* 2016). He championed the possibility of a new airport on the Thames Estuary, an idea from the 1960s that he resurrected to avoid the divisive controversy over Heathrow expansion. Johnson continually pushed the scheme, inevitably labelled 'Boris Island', even after it was described as 'politically dangerous' and rejected by a 2014 independent commission (*Financial Times* 2014).

Johnson secured government funding for a number of his larger projects including the Garden Bridge, Crossrail and policing (Hern 2013) though the government did not act on the Johnson-created London Finance Commission's (2013) recommendation that more funding be devolved the mayor. There was constant tension with the government, driven in part by Johnson's increasingly thinly disguised political ambitions. Johnson frequently confronted the government, challenging it over crime (2008), education (2009), housing (2010), policing and the riots (2011) and Downing Street came to expect and accept Johnson's regular politicised distancing (Gimson 2016). There was uneasiness between mayor and prime minister; despite claims Johnson and Cameron were friends at Eton, they did not actually know each other particularly well and maintained a chilly distance (Gimson 2016). Popular with the Tory membership, Johnson revelled in stealing the limelight from Cameron at a succession of conferences and events. Most damaging for Cameron, Johnson broke

Conservative policy in calling for an EU referendum from 2009 onwards and also became a champion for lower tax, twin areas where Johnson would curry favour with backbench Conservative MPs in any future leadership election (Gimson 2016).

## **Conclusion**

The London mayoralty has indeed proved to be strong and weak (Sweeting 2002). **Livingstone and Johnson carved out distinct approaches to placed-based leadership, using their formal powers and London's status as a distinct 'place' on the global stage. London is one of several cities around the world where placed-based leaders used their powers to create political space for collaboration, moving 'beyond pragmatism' to push bold, progressive policy (Hambleton 2017a).**

Politically, they used their image as rebels to distinguish themselves from their parties: they were perhaps, in different ways, archetypal 'party-detached' autonomous leaders (Copus 2011). They also pushed heavily-personalised policies and Livingstone in particular made a powerful mark with a series of policy innovations (Copus 2009, 44-45). London is littered with images and policies distinctly associated with each individual mayor, from the congestion charge and skyline to 'Boris bikes' and 'Kenbassies'.

Livingstone and Johnson used a mixture of power, publicity and policy to fashion a space for the new mayoralty and embed change. Given the institutional constraints, both used their powers along the same lines: their notable policies lay primarily in transport, with similar progress in planning. It proved more difficult to deal with shared issues such as housing. Both mayors stretched institutional limits through strategy, personalised policy and coalition-building to reach beyond the rather narrow original mayoral remit. There was a noted tendency or drift towards certain areas, but also conflict with central government and London's boroughs. As predicted, institutional weaknesses were partly overridden by the courting of an ever receptive media.

As similar as they may appear, their mandate and vision took very different trajectories. Livingstone had a vision that translated into concrete aims and pushed bold and controversial signature policies, from the congestion charge to more symbolic moves on civil partnerships, though it faded by his second term. Johnson too championed signature issues but was less innovative: he had achieved a high level of cross-party popularity and was keen to retain it. Livingstone was experienced but divisive – polarising opinion, as he had done his entire career, and became bogged down in controversy and scandal. Differing media treatment was perhaps key though personality played a part: while Livingstone seemed to thrive on conflict he later observed that Johnson’s ‘fatal flaw’ was that he ‘wanted to be liked’ and others noted Johnson’s ‘excessive desire to be liked’ (Gimson 2016). Rather surprisingly in retrospect, while both continued to court controversy, it is Livingstone who left a lasting positive impression. A 2017 YouGov Poll found a positive view of Livingstone but much less so for Johnson:

Table 3 here

In adapting Hambleton and Sweeting (2004), we see that leadership style provided the starkest differentiations across the two mayors. Livingstone’s direct and extensive experience of leading London contrasted sharply with Johnson who delegated and distanced himself from the detail of administration. Livingstone had a serious and largely fixed political identity. Johnson adopted a more post-ideological, ambiguous position, partly out of ambition (Yates 2010). Johnson used the platform and mayoral institution for publicity and to stake out positions, rather than pursue concrete policies for London. Johnson’s conflicts were more conflicted than Livingstone’s; Livingstone’s London was a platform for personalised change, Johnson’s for personal ambition.

**The third Mayor of London, Sadiq Khan, appears less of a rebel than his predecessors and more determined to govern as a mainstream, centrist and ‘serious’ politician. Nevertheless, his policy emphasis on transport, pollution and crime are familiar ones. Despite his apparent acceptance of Corbynism, he offers a different kind of Labour that is anti-Brexit, rooted in a place-based support**

for London's heavy Remain vote, and as the first Muslim politician in charge of a Western Europe capital, stands as a powerful progressive symbol of London. His signature policies on affordable housing and pollution charges (labelled the 'T-charge') build on Livingstone's policies but his mayoralty has already also a series of placed based stances against Donald Trump's Muslim ban and, more recently, Uber. He has also dealt with a spate of terror attacks and the disaster at Grenfell Tower (Financial Times 3 Oct 2017). Khan has also followed the trend of undoing his predecessor's legacy: Khan moved to dismantle several Johnson projects including the controversial garden bridge project.

As of 2017, roughly a third of the population of England now live under mayoral regimes and placed based, city representation is now a permanent feature of England's new local constitutional arrangements. The new metro-mayors in Greater Manchester, Merseyside, the West Midlands, the West of England, Cambridge & Peterborough and the Tees Valley each have varying local powers, according to the individual devolution deals struck prior to their inception. Unlike London, the new mayors powers are devolved from the centre rather than upwards. The Mayors of the new 'combined authorities' face less scrutiny, relying on backbench committees rather than assemblies for accountability (Bogdanor 2017: Terry 2017).

The experience of London offers lessons to the new mayors. There is concern that their generally limited power, small budgets and lack of recognition may make them 'featherweight mayors' (Hambleton 2017). The Mayors have 'a mandate from the electorate' but 'very little else to support [them] in carving out a completely new role' as 'city representative' (Headlam and Hepburn 2017, 746). As in London political vision, signature policies and visibility can be used to stretch power and garner public support. The new mayors must go 'beyond formal powers' and act as 'ambassador, cheerleader and negotiator-in-chief for their city region' (Centre for Cities 2017a). So far they have focused on skills, transport and housing, with Andy Burnham in Greater Manchester is pushing at the edge of his powers over homelessness (Centre for Cities 2017a). Yet

**compromise and coalition building will also be crucial: in at least two authorities ‘the mayor will face ‘cohabitation’ and ‘in practice, all of the mayors will have to garner consensus to deliver tangible outcomes’ (House of Commons Library 2017).**

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Tables

Table 1: Ken Livingstone Job Satisfaction 2000-2006

	2000	2002	2003	2006
Very Satisfied	5	6	11	10
Fairly satisfied	25	29	38	37
Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	31	40	15	12
Fairly dissatisfied	9	5	14	16
Very dissatisfied	5	3	17	19
No opinion / don't know	19	25	5	7

(see *IPSOS/Mori 2006*)

Table 2: Boris’s Big Achievements: Which of the following do you think was Boris Johnson’s biggest success as Mayor?

Boris Johnson’s policy success	%
Cycle hire	18
Olympics	16
London living wage	15
Alcohol ban	7
Crossrail	6
Decommissioning bendy buses	6
Introducing route masters	3
Response to Riots	1
No successes	12

YouGov/QMUL 2017 Mayoral Ratings

Mayor	Total Good Job	Total Bad Job
Ken Livingstone	47	27
Boris Johnson	46	40
Sadiq Khan	58	24

(YouGov/Queen Mary 2017)

