Rebels as local leaders? The Mayoralities of Ken Livingstone and Boris Johnson Compared

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The Mayoralty of London offers a powerful electoral platform but weak powers to lead a city regarded as ‘ungovernable’ (Travers 2004). This paper adapts the criteria of Hambleton and Sweeting (2004) to look at the first two Mayors’ mandate and vision, style of leadership and policies.

Ken Livingstone and Boris Johnson were both party rebels, mavericks and skilled media operators. However, their differences are key. As mayor, Livingstone had a powerful vision that translated into a set of clear policy aims while Johnson had a weaker more cautious approach shaped by his desire for higher office. Livingstone built coalitions but proved divisive whereas Johnson was remarkably popular. While Livingstone bought experience and skill, Johnson delegated detail to others. Both their mayoralties courted controversy and faced charges of corruption and cronyism.

Both mayors used publicity to make up for weak powers. They also found themselves pushed by their powers towards transport and planning while struggling with deeper issues such as housing. In policy terms Livingstone pushed ahead with the radical congestion charge and a series of symbolic policies. Johnson was far more modest, championing cycling and revelling in the 2012 Olympics while avoiding difficult decisions. The two mayors used their office to negotiate but also challenge central government. Livingstone’s Mayoralty was a platform for personalised change-Johnson’s one for personal ambition.

Directly Elected Mayors were introduced to provide local leadership, accountability and vision to UK local government. Beginning under New Labour and continued under the Coalition and Conservatives, directly elected mayors were offered initially by referendum, and later imposed, up and down the country beginning with London 2000 and then in 16 cities and towns including Bristol and Liverpool. A series of ‘Metro Mayors’ governing six new combined authorities, including Manchester and the West Midlands, are set to follow in May 2017 (House of Commons Library 2016). The Mayor of London is the centrepiece and ultimate test for these new local arrangements.

The new mayoral model drew ‘inspiration from European and American experience’ and ‘appealed to both Labour and Conservative Parties’ by ‘offering an apparent solution to perceived problems of local leadership’ by either reinvigorating local democracy or creating a figure who could cut through staid bureaucracy (Fenwick and Elcock 2014, 581-582). The result was 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 new leaders could challenge established party groupings, operating with relative autonomy to build wider coalitions and push new policy (Copus 2004). The mayors would be ‘more independent leadership than the typical U.K. council leader’ and offer ‘facilitative leadership’ and work through ‘cooperation rather than command, with leaders striving to secure broad, consensual participation rather than using formal powers of command to effect change’ (Hambleton and Sweeting 2004, 481). They would ‘set goals and persuade, cajole, or convince others to follow’ while their legitimacy and power would enable them to ‘overcome resistance to particular courses of action’ (Hambleton and Sweeting 2004, 481: Leach and Wilson 2000, 49). Hambleton and Sweeting (2004) argued that the new mayors would be
...more Americanized, in the sense they will need to give more attention to the presentation of their policies to the media and to the population at large. The media is likely to become more important, and politicians with flair and personal appeal can be expected to gain from this (485).

The consensus so far is that the mayors have provided some sort of new focus: ‘the mayoral initiative in England has generated facilitative local leadership, not only through the individual characteristics of mayors but also through institutional design’ (Howard and Elcock 2014, 596: Gains et al 2007). Stoker and Greasley (2008) agreed that ‘Mayors in England, with their greater decision-making authority and fewer veto constraints, have provided more visible and high-profile leadership’ (728). They concluded that ‘institutional design does make a difference’ and ‘municipal authorities are pursuing a more ‘visible, partnership-based, open, and less partisan form of leadership’ (Stoker and Greasley 2008, 728). The new mayors have not, however, generated any ‘popular excitement’, as judged by local turnout or participation (Howard and Elcock 2014, 596). There may also be cultural barriers as ‘the problem in adopting the mayoral model from overseas is partly one of prevailing political culture [as] in an English context, powerful individual leaders do not have a ready cultural acceptance’ (Howard and Elcock 2014, 597).

Nevertheless, the creation of elected mayors has changed the debate about local leadership in the United Kingdom, which now shares similarities with the United States (Hambleton and Sweeting 2004, 480). This paper adapts Hambleton and Sweeting dimensions of local leadership drawn from the US (2004) to look at the new London Mayor:

1. Mandate and Vision (their goals and electoral support)
2. Leadership style (method and approach to governing)
3. Policies and use of institutional powers (policies implemented or pushed and how they used their powers)

The three aspects are shaped by the environment, context and institutions of the new leader and sit upon the crucial distinction between ‘power over’ and ‘power to’ (Hambleton and Sweeting 2004, 481)

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

Travers characterised London as an ‘ungovernable city’ (2004). As a metropolis in constant change it faces severe problems, from a complex and ‘rapidly changing population’, pressurised and aging services, congestion, poor infrastructure and a historic lack of investment in almost all its essential services, from housing to health and education (Travers 2004:Travers 2015: Whitehead 2010).

The ungovernability is worsened by constant political flux. In the last 30 years London has tried 4 systems of government, including a Greater London Council until 1986 and a formal grouping of local authorities in the 1990s (Travers 2004). The 1990s was a decade of experimentation with ‘new ways of working’, where the lack of a metropolitan government encouraged the development of -bipartisan work across authorities (Syrett 2006, 299). By 2000 London’s governance system was ‘complex and fragmented’ with power divided between 32 London boroughs (municipal local authorities) and central government, with Whitehall jealously guarding the vast part of London’s finance (xii). The new Mayor of London was thus ‘parachuted in’ to ‘seething and chaotic system’ (Travers 2004, xii)

The Greater London Authority was created by the 1999 Greater London Authority Act, the longest piece of legislation in post-war history. It was designed, politically, to give London wide government without handing too much power to a figure who could use it as a platform against government-as
happened in the 1980s (Wilson and Game 2011). The idea was to create a US style mayor, with an executive legislative split and clear separation of powers (Hambleton and Sweeting 2004). The GLA Act thus created a mayor–council form of city government, comprising a directly elected Mayor of London and 25-member London Assembly with a formal separation of powers between the executive (the Mayor), and the legislature (the Assembly) which scrutinises them (Sweeting 2003). The GLA the governed via four bodies: Transport For London, the Metropolitan Police Authority, London Fire and Emergency Planning and the London Development Agency—though this underwent some change in the first decade (Wilson and Game 2011).

The Mayor of London was granted the authority and ‘legitimacy of direct election’ and ‘the profile that the post brings’. Formally, in another US inspiration, the mayor was also given the power to make extensive ‘(non-merit) political adviser appointments, and merit-based appointees’ (Sweeting 2003, 471). Despite the powers of patronage and profile any other direct powers are ‘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, ambient noise, and economic development and regeneration’ (Sweeting 2003, 471). The mayor would also be limited in resource terms and institutionally weaker than previous London government. Syrett (2006) points out that ‘whilst the previous GLC employed some 10,000 staff...the GLA itself and its functional bodies such as the LDA are much smaller organisations operating to strategies, enable and co-ordinate activity, often working through and with other bodies in the delivery of activities.’ (301). The mayor also had a very small budget— with control of only 10% of overall London spending, a very small amount compared with their Parisian or New York equivalents. In funding terms, the Mayor of London would be ‘squashed’ between jealously guarded central government funding and borough budgets (Travers 2004).

The Mayor of London would thus be both ‘strong’ and ‘weak’. While they would ‘dominate decision making inside the GLA...outside the GLA, in formal terms, the Mayor is weak’ and London governance would remain ‘fragmented between many organisations’ (Sweeting 2002, 17). The mixture of Mayoral/GLA competencies and control’ would perpetuate rather than solve ‘complex governance arrangements that often lack coherence and accountability’ (Syrett 2006, 307). The ‘constraints of the Mayor and GLA’s competencies and financial base fundamentally limit the scope and scale of action’ on vital areas over housing, education and schools’ (Syrett 2006, 306). As Travers explained:

> The Greater London Authority, consisting of a Mayor and Assembly, is an oddity...The GLA’s powers are strategic and were limited by Whitehall resistance to devolution. Policy delivery is in the hands of ‘functional bodies’ and/or the London boroughs and...the GLA budget is modest (2002, 779).

Many thought that the uneasy position would be a recipe for conflict and tensions in numerous directions: upwards to central government and downwards to boroughs. Sweeting (2003) predicted that ‘future relations between Mayor and central government are likely to be characterised by rows about powers and finance but will have deeper roots in the location of political sovereignty over the capital’ (476).

While the prospects for local action appeared limited, there were opportunities and sources of power. First, the ‘informal powers of the Mayor could go some way to the future extension of influence’ as ‘authority, legitimacy and profile can contribute to generating mayoral strength’ and strategic use of the media could further strengthen their position (Sweeting 2003, 476). Second, the Mayor would have the ‘benefit of being directly elected’ giving them ‘considerable political authority
and legitimacy’ as a figure with one of the largest direct mandates in Western Europe (Sweeting 2003, 476). Third, a consensual collaborative style could produce results. The London Mayor was created amid a shift ‘from networked governance without a centre to network governance with a weak centre’, and a conciliatory and persuasive local leader could have an influence if they worked with the grain of this approach (Kleinmann et al., 2002 in Syrett 2006, 300). Like the US president, the new position would be about ‘persuasion and bargaining’ with partners for policy and, most significantly, central government for funding (Neustadt 1990: Travers and Whitehead 2010). Finally, the power of the Mayor, some predicted, would not stand still. In fact the Mayor of London has regularly gained greater influence with an expansion of the powers in 2007 over strategic planning, waste and housing (Travers and Whitehead 2010) and in 2011 when the Metropolitan Police Authority was disbanded at midnight and replaced by the Mayor’s Office for Policing and Crime (MOPC). The abolition of the London Development Agency in 2012 also meant some newer powers were taken within City Hall and authority over the Olympic legacy was also handed to them. So far governments have resisted greater taxation powers for London (London Finance Commission 2013).

‘Ken’ and ‘Boris’ 2000-2016

At first glance the parallels between Livingstone and Johnson appear obvious (Edwards and Isaby 2008). The first two Mayors of London fitted the mood of a ‘more Americanized’ local leader, as politicians with flair and personal appeal who could push policy and use the media (Hambleton and Sweeting 2004, 485). Boris Johnson styled himself as ‘overly candid political maverick’ and Livingstone was equally so (Edwards and Isaby 2008, 44). Both were rebels within their own party, with unorthodox views and a popular reach (Edwards and Isaby 2008). They positioned themselves as outsiders running ‘against’ their party and the ability to court controversy—despite government and Mayor being of the same party for much of their time (though Livingstone was an independent between 2000 and 2003 and fought the government in court).

Both leaders had highly attuned media skills and a powerful media presence: they were two of the few politicians in the UK to be known by their first name (Edwards and Isaby 2008). Their ‘spontaneous approach’ created an ‘almost personal, emotive connection with the audience’—what one academic described as a ‘flirtation’ with the electorate (Wood et al 2016, 592: Yates 2010). Partly as a result, they could court approval and support that the more conventional politician could not (Carvel 1984: Wood et al 2016, 590). Their two ‘friendly’ and maverick exteriors also concealed political ruthlessness (Carvel 1984: Gimson 2016).

While these comparisons are appealing, their similarities masked deep differences. Partly this is explained by the distinction between the celebrity politician (Ken Livingstone) and the celebrity politician (Boris Johnson) (Wood et al 2016, 584). Livingstone made his name from his political notoriety when head of the Greater London Council, buoyed by a hostile media that he cleverly turned to his advantage (Carvel 1984). Johnson was far less political and much more a ‘celebrity’, with his status acquired as a panellist on Have I got news for you and his extensive journalism rather than through holding political office. While Livingstone was a gifted media performer Johnson resembled more an ‘Everyday Political Celebrity’, a type that includes Sarah Palin, Beppe Grillo and Nigel Farage (Wood et al 2016). These ‘spontaneous and gaffe prone’ politicians use non-traditional two way media to show themselves ‘as inevitably flawed’ but equally ‘authentic’, rooting their appeal in their radicalism and anti-establishment appeal (586).

Crucially, Livingstone’s media skills always served his radical politics: he possessed a clear policy orientation and transparent set of goals, some of which were both controversial and deeply unpopular (Carvel 1984). While Livingstone’s supposed radical politics combined with his media
skills, Johnson followed an evolving (conscious) celebrity strategy (592). Johnson’s approach was more about personal ambition and far less political—despite a regular utterance of controversial pronouncements he had little or no political philosophy (Purcell 2012: Grimson 2016).

The two mayors also had strikingly different backgrounds and political experience. Livingstone was a comprehensive educated London boy, who never attended university but instead became deeply involved in London and Labour politics from the early 1970s onwards. Having spent time in Housing Authorities, Livingstone was elected as a member to the Greater London Council in 1973 and then led it between 1981 and 1986, where he made his name and earned his notoriety. He was then an MP for Brent East from 1987 until 2000.

Boris Johnson was a far less likely candidate for outsider or rebel status having attended Eton then Oxford, where he joined the notorious Bullingdon club (Wood et al 2016: Dommett 2016). As a Daily Telegraph journalist based in Brussels he championed Euroscepticism before becoming an MP 2001 until 2008. He had little direct experience of governing: he was briefly Shadow Minister for Arts 2003 until 2004 before being sacked for lying over an affair and then Shadow Minister for Higher Education from 2005-2007. Rather than politics Johnson made his name on television (Grimson 2016: Flinders 2016).

In looking across the two mayoralties, it is the differences rather than the similarities that account for their rather varied trajectories. Livingstone bought vision and experience, but also polarised support and controversy that eventually undid him. Johnson proved less visionary and more headline grabbing but cautious in policy terms, with one eye increasingly on his future career.

Table 1 Livingstone and Johnson Compared

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mayoralty</th>
<th>Ken</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Mandate and Vision</strong></td>
<td>Outsider and independent then Labour. Key aims as leader-inequality, regeneration, environment (global city) Inner London mandate-divisive</td>
<td>Outsider and outspoken in Conservative party Caution: Tax cuts, transport (global city) More hands off Mayor Outer London mandate popular</td>
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<td><strong>Leadership style</strong></td>
<td>Controversial and outspoken Celebrity politician? Alliance builder and experienced-though confrontational</td>
<td>Controversial and outspoken ‘Everyday Celebrity’ politician Delegated to series of Deputies and experienced officials</td>
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**Measuring the London Mayoralty**

Measuring the two successive mayoralties offers several convenient points of departure. The governing context of the two leaders was broadly similar as both Mayors ‘benefited from being able
to capture the benefits of three decades of near-continuous economic development’ (Travers 2016). Their general approach was to promote the ‘world city’ and support ‘the continuation of the pro-market business environment that developed in London from the late 1980s’ (Syrett 2006). The development also had its downsides, as the two mayors inherited London’s ungovernability and a series of serious problems. Foremost among them was London’s housing crisis, triggered by a mixture of rising population, poor investment and central government action, all factors over which they had little control (Prospect 2016: Financial Times 2016a).

Due to the shape and limitations of the new office, the mayors tilted towards certain policy, notably transport and planning-and Johnson inherited infrastructure projects such as Crossrail as well as the Olympic games of 2012. The two leaders were also caught up in, or swept up in, an institutional drift towards planning and grand projects and Carmona (2012) notes their approach to planning bore ‘remarkable similarities’. The two mayors also maximised their US style appointments power and patronage to create what Livingstone called ‘Kenocracy’ or ‘Borisocracy’ of advisors and deputies (Hoskyns 2008). In seeking to extend their powers, as both did, they Mayors benefited from being granted greater formal influence but continually sought to create power by ‘mission creep’ and publicity (Pimlott and Rao 2004, 173). There were also public rows with central government over policy, resources and powers –some of which were contrived positioning but some of which marked very real conflict.

In other ways measuring the two leaders is problematic. Politically, Ken Livingstone was an Independent then a Labour Mayor 2004-2008, which necessarily meant a different approach, whereas Johnson was always Conservative. Institutionally, the London Mayoralty was built from scratch by Livingstone who ‘lost’ two years doing so, whereas Johnson inherited an established and embedded system (Livingstone 2011). There is also a problem of policy tracing as numerous initiatives or policies were inherited or shared: Johnson’s ‘Boris Bikes’ cycle hire scheme originated with Livingstone and Johnson reaped the political benefit of the 2012 London Olympics, hard fought for by Tony Blair and Ken Livingstone in 2005. Other large scale planning projects crossed over as did problems such as housing.

This paper is framed by the debate around Directly Elected Mayors in the UK (see Fenwick and Elcock 2014). It draws on publically available assessments of the Mayoralty (see Sweeting 2002: Travers 2008) and academic analysis of particular policies (see Leape 2006). It also draws on opinion polling (Yougov 2016) and biographical works of Livingstone (see Carvel 1984: 1999: Hoskyns 2008: Livingstone 2011) and Johnson (see Purnell 2012: Gimson 2016).

**Ken Livingstone 2000-2008**

Ken Livingstone’s name, forever rendered as ‘Red Ken’, was synonymous with London in the 1980s. He carried a divisive reputation as a left-wing ‘folk’ hero and extremist hate figure of the so-called ‘Loony Left’. Livingstone has led the Greater London Council (GLC) between 1981 and 1986, seizing control of it the day after the election through a left-wing caucus when he carried out a coup against the Labour leader (see Carvel 1984: Hoskyns 2008). Under Livingstone the GLC became a ‘platform for wider range of causes’ and he joined forces with a range of left and centre groups, ‘rainbow coalition,’ to support 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 Livingstone as the head of left-wing local government opposition to Thatcher, symbolised by the banner displayed across from Thatcher’s Westminster office with London’s unemployed. Others saw the GLC as a platform for ‘gesture politics and extremism’ and Livingstone came under powerful attack from the right wing press
Livingstone was described as a ‘maverick’ who did not fit ‘conventional stereotypes’ and ‘wears the mantle of the outsider’ (Carvel 1984 231). He was ‘populist, articulate and witty’ with a ‘flair for publicity and a relaxed public persona’ (Pimlott and Nao 2004, 34). For all his radicalism Livingstone was also an assiduous coalition builder at the centre of politics, frequently reaching out across party lines (Pimlott and Nao 2004: Livingstone 2011). Carvel (1984) described him, like Thatcher, as an ‘instinctive politician’ and found it ‘tempting to call him a populist’ (230). However, Carvel warned there was a ‘sharp contrast between style and content of his policies’ as he carried a ‘populist style’ but championed ‘radical evangelist policy’ and was willing to push a series of distinct policies that had ‘persistently proved unpopular with the electorate’ (235).

After the GLC was abolished in 1986 Livingstone remained a rebel within his own party in the 1990s. His path to victory in the London Mayorality in 2000 was also shrouded in controversy. Livingstone’s was the name most mentioned when Labour put forward proposals for a London Mayor in 1997-1998 and, given London was a Labour city, it was likely the Labour candidate would win. However, Tony Blair and others feared a return to the GLC and the policies they felt had left Labour in the electoral wilderness in the 1980s. So began a ‘bitter and cynically manipulated’ internal selection process for the Labour candidate that had the ‘sole objective...to stop Livingstone at all costs’ (Wilson and Game 2011, 74). Livingstone had his Labour candidacy blocked and so ran and won as an independent.

**Mandate and Vision**

Livingstone had a clear and 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, didn’t wholly cover. A number of these carried clear continuities with the GLC over reduced cost public transport and housing as well as symbolic moves over gay rights. This was bound within a ‘policy direction that would consolidate London’s new position as a major world city’ and Livingstone’s vision ‘of a multiracial, multicultural metropolis where people would be allowed to live their lives as they liked provided they did no harm to others’ (Travers 2004: Johnson 2008, 434). His second victory as a Labour candidate in 2004 was more moderate with emphasis on affordable housing and extending the congestion charge included public service improvement and a greater emphasis on tackling climate change (Travers and Whitehead 2010: Johnson 2008, 434). For all his supposed radicalism Livingstone also 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 loss in the 2008 and again in the 2012 election against Johnson (see Crines 2013).

London is often characterised electorally as doughnut with a red (Labour) core and a blue (Conservative) periphery. Livingstone’s mandate was often portrayed as being primarily ‘inner city based’. While this characterisation is rather crude, what is true is that Livingstone governed with a lopsided mandate. As with the GLC, in polling terms Livingstone also proved controversial and divisive as Mayor—the number of Londoners either satisfied or dissatisfied both increased during his time in office.

**Table X: Ken Livingstone Job Satisfaction 2000-2006**

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Livingstone thus had a very different trajectory of popularity from his successor, in part because of his ambitious agenda, policy choices but also because of his personality, which came across as controversial and authoritarian (Yates 2010). Livingstone faced a sceptical and sometimes hostile media, with a series of damaging rows with London’s main newspaper the Evening Standard from 2005 onwards (Hoskyns 2008). This came to a head when, in his second term Livingstone was suspended from office for a month for bringing his office into disrepute after likening a Jewish Standard reporter to a concentration camp guard. His ‘Kenocrcay’ and appointment of officials and advisors led to a steady drip of corruption allegations and, eventually a ‘barrage of negative stories’ over ‘grant-giving…influenced by favouritism’ and ‘allegations of cronyism’ that knocked his mayoralty off course (Johnson 2008, 480).

**Leadership style**

In his first term Livingstone was forced to take a conciliatory approach: as an independent he had ‘no choice but to create a new politics based on coalitions’ (Pimlott and Nao 2004, 163). He used his patronage powers to appoint Labour and Lib-Dem advisors and built alliances with Green and Labour assembly members (Livingstone 2011; Pimlott and Nao 2004). This also had the added advantage of ‘neutralising opponents’ and draw in potential critics who would otherwise scrutinise him (Pimlott and Nao 2004).

Livingstone also made use of his contacts and experience to appoint a team of close advisors from his time at the GLC—he claimed his close team had 152 years of governing London between them (see Livingstone 2011). The new mayor himself was described as having a ‘mastery of detail’ according to his Labour Deputy Mayor. He was the consummate technician and delegator with an intimate knowledge of London acquired from the 1970s (Hoskyns 2008).

As with the GLC Livingstone proved ‘adept at using publicity to his advantage’ to highlight issues and force movement (Sweeting 2003, 476). However, Livingstone’s approach provoked controversy and opposition. His major policies and approach made enemies. He fell out with the leaders of the 32 London boroughs in 2001, even fellow Labour politicians, and sought to circumvent their co-ordinating body while also provoking Conservative councils over the congestion charge and affordable housing targets (Pimlott and Nao 2004). Livingstone also used his powers to impose on

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*(source)*

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boroughs rather different views on ‘residential densities, housing allocations, waste regulation and tall buildings’, particularly when his powers over planning were extended from a veto to an override power in 2007 (Gordon and Travers 2010). By the end of his time in power Livingstone had a ‘tense and combative’ relationship with London boroughs (Holman and Thornley 2011). His high handed and conflictual approach gave Boris Johnson the opportunity to craft himself as a ‘hands off’ Mayor who return power to the overlooked or overruled London boroughs.

Policies and use of Institutional Powers

Livingstone’s championing of a congestion charge for central London was the centre piece of his Mayoralty, a policy he claimed was inspired by Milton Friedman (Livingstone 2011). In the past ‘attempts to introduce road pricing in Britain have historically encountered fierce political resistance’ and ‘many politicians regarded attempts to introduce congestion charging as foolhardy’ (Leape 2006, 173). Such a policy was widely regarded as ‘economically desirable, but socially unacceptable’, if not politically suicidal (Mackie 2005).

Livingstone faced the twin problems of implementing the scheme itself and running the complex IT system to make it work. It was initially intended as a relatively small experiment (Livingstone 2011). He faced powerful opposition from across the media and lobby groups, who predicted disaster, and scepticism from the government, who were reportedly preparing media strategies to distance themselves from it (Livingstone 2011). The failure would ‘kill his career’ and he claimed his own advisors also opposed it (Livingstone 2011). However, when it was introduced in 2003 it was

...both a practical success in reducing congestion and a popular success. Traffic delays inside the zone have decreased by around 30 percent, with a reduction of 15 percent in traffic circulating within the zone and 18 percent in traffic entering the zone during charging hours. Journey time reliability has improved by an average of 30 percent. (Leape 2006, 173)

More importantly ‘political opposition to the scheme’ was ‘minimal and popular support...widespread’ and Livingstone claimed that it was successful in part because of the extensive advance consultation and persuasion (Leape 2006, 173: Livingstone 2004). A more muted picture emerges from an analysis of the scheme’s social costs and benefits- especially as the scheme 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). Livingstone himself felt ‘overall, the scheme is a success and has worked better than I hoped, with far fewer teething problems than I expected’ (Livingstone 2004). The Western extension saw the charge rolled out to additionally include parts of Westminster and the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea, doubling the population covered. Even Boris Johnson, who scaled back the Western extension in 2011, agreed the scheme was a success (BBC 2013).

Table x; Effectiveness of the London Congestion Charge

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>How effective do you believe the congestion charge scheme has been in reducing traffic congestion in Central London?</th>
<th>%</th>
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<tr>
<td>Very effective</td>
<td>20</td>
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<td>Fairly effective</td>
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<td>Not very effective</td>
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<td>Not at all effective</td>
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Transport was perhaps the area where Livingstone made an obvious difference in other ways with the introduction of capped fares (in reflection of Fares Fair of GLC), electronic Oyster travel cards and the beginning of London’s new Crossrail system. There was ‘a significant increase in the number of buses and a relative fall in bus fares’ secured by extra government funding (Syrett 2006).

Housing and planning proved more difficult as the Mayor had less control over housing until 2006 (Whitehead 2010). Livingstone set a series of ambitious affordable housing targets, aiming at 50% target, but regularly fell below them. He also clashed with some boroughs and named and shamed those (Tory) ones he felt were not co-operating (Kenworthy 2015: Evening Standard 2007). He also used his powers over planning to regenerate green spaces with a 100 spaces project that, though it fell short of its targets, was seen as ambitious attempt to reshape the city’s design. Livingstone’s London plans, rooted in a very particular vision that wove his themes of social equality and environmental protection, offered a ‘radical strategic approach’ that were ‘strongly precise and prescriptive’ that were both ‘spatially and terminologically specific…and links this to guidance directed at the boroughs’(Holman and Thornley 2011).

Livingstone pushed at edges of his institutional power. He deployed publicity with a ‘succession of campaigns to raise awareness both within London and national government on a number of social issues especially pertinent to London’ including child poverty, gender wage inequality and the level of the minimum wage (Syrett 2006, 305). He also used grand projects as a means to other ends, using, for example, the winning of the London Olympics for 2012 as a means to regenerate East London.

As predicted, clashes with central government were common. The New Labour government initially greeted Livingstone’s election in 2000 with combination of ‘sulky hauteur, dark suspicion and realpolitik’ (Pimlott and Nao 2004, 164). Livingstone fought the government in the courts over the financing of transport for London: ‘It is widely acknowledged that Livingstone ‘won’ the public debate regarding tube financing, yet the courts ruled in the government’s favour’ (in Sweeting 2003, 476). He was also an outspoken supporter of transport strikes and critical of the government’s policies including the invasion of Iraq in 2003. Nevertheless, he was re-admitted into the Labour party by 2003 and worked closely with Tony Blair in winning the London Olympics in 2005. Livingstone also proved adept in negotiations with central government and was able to secure funding not only for the congestion charge but a series of large-scale transport improvements and, eventually, greater powers (Travers and Whitehead 2010).
Boris Johnson 2008-2016

Johnson made for a very different mayor than Livingstone (Flinders 2016; Gimson 2016). Johnson had no background in local government (Holman and Thornley 2011). He was, it is claimed, the last ditch candidate and was himself reluctant to give up safe seat as an MP until 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 image as celebrity and jester and Livingstone saw him as a serious threat (Crines 2013). His political approach mixed a nostalgic view of an English past and ‘retro masculinity’ with a post-modern, PR driven flirtation with diverse political audiences (Yates 2010). Johnson’s approach was an ‘affront to serious people’s idea of how politics should be conducted’ with his vague philosophy described as a brand of ‘merry England conservatism’ (Gimson 2016). One biographer identified his ‘genuine bogusness’ in which, like Bill Clinton, ‘shamelessness was the key to his success’ (Gimson 2016). Given the power of his self-created ‘brand’ some, including erstwhile ally Michael Gove, questioned his willingness to make ‘tough decisions’ (Shipman 2016).

Mandate and Vision

Johnson’s unexpected victory in 2008, in a Labour city, meant he faced very different, and lesser, set of expectations from Livingstone. The key aim for Johnson was, in essence, not to fail (Gimson 2016). Tony Travers pointed out that he ‘took office with virtually no expectations’ and this constituted a ‘huge advantage’ (Guardian 2012). 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). He came to office with far fewer concrete plans or signature issues than Livingstone, promising a Conservative set of commitments to abolish the western extension, lower council tax and fight crime (Purnell 2012). Johnson’s approach was ‘based on pragmatic populism’ over cycling and reverting back to older style buses, and his time in office was peppered with symbolic changes such as banning alcohol on the London Underground (Holman and Thornley 2011). Johnson also championed local autonomy and less interference for the London boroughs (Holam and Thornley 2015). Johnson’s Conservatism was, however, ‘elastic and ambiguous’. Though he defended bankers and called for an EU referendum from 2009 onwards, he also took a liberal stance on immigration and opposed government over what he famously termed ‘Kosovo style cleansing’ over housing relocation (Purnell 2012).

Partly because of Johnson’s ‘everyday’ appeal, his popularity in London and across the country was consistently high and far ahead of Prime Minister David Cameron. Johnson was seen as charismatic and endowed with cross-party appeal: ‘Britain’s Heineken politician: refreshing parts of the public that other politicians can’t reach’ (Wood et al 2016 590). In 2012 polling found his (hypothetical) presence as leader of the party would add a 6 point lead to a Conservative general election win (Dommett 2016). One analysis of his second term concluded that ‘his approval rating has been remarkably consistent…and has been drastically higher than most national politicians’ throughout (YouGov 2016).
The one danger moment for Johnson came in 2011 with a series of riots across London. Johnson’s apparent refusal to return home 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, blaming schools and engineering an argument over policing with Home Secretary Theresa May (Gimson 2016).

Politically, Johnson’s key achievement was to win twice in a Labour city. His success rested on a different electoral base than Livingstone’s, the outer ‘Blue’ London, though Johnson’s 2012 election win was close and it was obvious the demographics had changed (Holam and Thornley 2015). The media were more supportive of Johnson than Livingstone and gave precedence to his stunts and photo opportunities—the Evening Standard consistently supported him and one of the Evening Standard’s key critics of Livingstone was appointing Cycling Commissioner by Johnson in 2013 (Johnson 2008). Johnson proved adept at using social media and two way communications to sell his 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, a preparation to fulfil his ambitions for higher office (and to become Prime Minister). Johnson also faces charges of disinterest and being a ‘part-time’ Mayor as his search for a safe Tory 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 denials he eventually did so, beings selected in August 2014 and becoming MP for Uxbridge and Ruislip in May 2015 (Purnell 2011: Gimson 2016). From the outset of his second term Johnson had also put together a team to help him win the Conservative leadership and even offered to lead Cameron’s EU renegotiations in 2015/16 (Shipman 2016).

Leadership style

Johnson as Mayor was ‘long on charisma and short on detail’ (Financial Times 2016). As an ‘Everyday Celebrity’ Johnson’s Mayoralty constantly chased spontaneous events and opportunities and made headlines insulting various groups (Dommett 2016). Johnson ‘can be viewed as the celebrity politician par excellence, whose charismatic and eccentric public persona appears to provide an antidote to the technocratic managerial style of party politicians today’. This defined his ‘approach’ as ‘one of seeking publicity with a range of ad-hoc statements and schemes’ (Holman and Thornley...
His Mayoralty can be viewed as a series of photo opportunities, epitomised when he took part in a 2011 police drugs raid, complete with TV cameras and a stab vest, when the suspect greeted his appearance with the words ‘what the fuck are you doing here’? (Gimson 2016). Johnson was also lucky to have positive PR events such as the Olympics and Diamond Jubilee to draw London together. The Olympic games in London 2012 was the high water mark of Johnson’s use of his media image to ‘exploit postmodern methods of political communication’: ‘from waving to crowds whilst suspended on a zip wire, to ‘dad dancing’ to the Spice Girls at the closing ceremony, 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 Assembly (Dommett 2016).

In terms of governing, Johnson was far less experienced than Livingstone and delegated policy to a series of Deputy Mayors and an experienced Chief of staff. He ‘appointed effective people to run City Hall while he carried on as the front man’ from Simon Milton, deputy mayor for policy, and Eddie Lister, who ‘both won the respect of the mainly Labour borough councils’ (Independent 2016). Johnson ‘surrounded himself with competent people’ in other areas including former BBC journalist Guto Harri to manage communications (Gimson 2016). As with Livingstone, Johnson appointed advisors to create a US style system of political appointees at City Hall, a ‘Borisocracy’, that carried its own dangers. The personalised nature of the advisors led to charges of corruption and cronyism, with Johnson losing three deputy Mayors in one year in various exposes and expenses scandals. Controversy gathered over some of his more grandiose planning projects.

**Policies and use of Institutional Powers**

In contrast to Livingstone’s ambitious agenda, Johnson’s aim was ‘not to make a mess of things’ especially over the 2012 Olympics, and to ‘keep London running’ (Gimson 2016). Although Johnson presented himself as a politician who would ‘sketch daring enterprises and fill in the detail later’ his Mayoralty was marked by ‘caution’ tied to his future ambitions (Gimson 2016). Travers (2016) argued that ‘having been attacked by his opponents before taking office for being incompetent and unprepared, his period in office has been surprisingly, well, normal’. Johnson’s most serious flexing of his institutional power came very early in 2008 when he sacked the Metropolitan Police Commissioner Iain Blair after a string of controversies. Although he did not strictly have the power to do so, Johnson orchestrated a media campaign to make the Commissioner’s position untenable (Purnell 2012).

The difference in the two mayor’s approaches can be seen in their strategic plans. While Livingstone’s ‘strode ahead with a strategic vision’ Johnson’s 2011 replacement ‘shuffled along in pragmatism’ with a looser approach that did not attempt to override or other bodies (Holman and Thornley 2011). One study concluded that the ‘switch in style raises for us the question of whether the new pragmatism has meant a loss in strategic planning and leadership for London’ (Holman and Thornley 2011).

As table X shows, Johnson’s most eye-catching policy was his bike hire scheme (dubbed ‘Boris Bikes’) followed by the Olympics and the introduction of the London living wage (the latter part of a wider attempt to capture the issue of minimum wages from the left). His reversal of the Western extension of the congestion charge in 2011 was perhaps the most eye-catching negative action. Perhaps as a reflection of his more modest aims, more than 1 in 10 felt Johnson had no policy legacy (Yougov 2016).
Despite his promises of (re) empowering boroughs, Johnson Outer London Commission lost momentum amid tension and lack of clarity, despite a re-boot in his second term. Despite his promises Johnson too overrode boroughs authority over planning decisions (Halam and Thornley 2015). Just as Johnson undid parts of Livingstone’s congestion charge so Saddiq Khan, Johnson’s Labour successor in 2016, reversed Johnson’s ‘bendy’ bus reforms and reconsidered a number of his planning projects, focusing on the increasingly costly and controversial Thames garden bridge.

Johnson also sought to solve London’s growing housing crisis and built more affordable homes than Livingstone, in part because he loosened the designation of what was deemed affordable (Kenworthy 2015: Financial Times 2016a). It was widely felt Johnson lacked the political will to do more. Although he championed targeted ‘housing zones’ he refused to criticise government policy and also undermined his own targets by allowing building projects with too few affordable proportions, sometimes overriding borough objections (Prospect 2016: Financial Times 2016a). Despite being given greater power over housing, Johnson turned what was a ‘problem’ under Livingstone into a ‘crisis’ by the end of Mayorality (Whitehead 2010).

Carmona (2012) reflected that ‘the first 10 years of the GLA has been a growing culture of concern for urban design in London, in which both mayors...have played a significant role’ (42). Though Johnson promised to protect London’s ‘precious skyline’ and end the ‘drab, featureless and phallocratic’ towers Livingstone has authorised he also found himself pulled towards planning projects. While Livingstone gave permission to 27 tall buildings Johnson authorised 437 and sided with developers on all 14 occasions when asked to adjudicate (BDonline 2016). Johnson undid Livingstone’s ‘100 spaces project’, strongly criticised the London former Plan as ‘a Zone 1 [i.e. inner London] plan’ and claimed that there should be ‘overriding emphasis...on leafy outer London’ (Carmona 2012, 39). However, Johnson ‘changed little’ in his planning approach’ and ‘launched his own Great Spaces initiative...an initiative to revitalise the capital’s unique public spaces’ though is revitalisation of Parliament square failed. Carmona (2012) concluded that ‘on the face of it, it

### Table X: Boris Johnson’s policy success

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Boris Johnson’s policy success</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cycle hire</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Olympics</td>
<td>16</td>
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<tr>
<td>London living wage</td>
<td>15</td>
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<tr>
<td>Alcohol ban</td>
<td>7</td>
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<tr>
<td>Crossrail</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decommissioning bendy buses</td>
<td>6</td>
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<tr>
<td>Introducing route masters</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Response to Riots</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No successes</td>
<td>12</td>
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(Yougov 2016)
seemed remarkably similar to the 100 Public Spaces programme it replaced, but with a greater focus on outer London’ (40).

Following his penchant for media attention, Johnson also displayed a ‘quixotic tendency’ to pursue ‘showy’ ideas from cable cars to buildings, and promoted several grand projects that failed to come to fruition, from London’s ports to the Olympic Park (Financial Times 2016: BDonline 2016). Johnson long pursued the possibility of a new airport on the Thames Estuary, an idea from 1960s that he championed to avoid the controversy over expanding Heathrow that could prove divisive for his mayoralty and for any parliamentary seat near London. The scheme was dubbed ‘Boris Island’ and Johnson continued to push it, even after it was labelled as ‘politically dangerous’ and rejected by Independent Commission in 2014 (FT 1/9/2014).

As with Livingstone there was constant tension with the government, partly to allow Johnson to distance himself and partly because of his increasingly poorly disguised political ambitions. Johnson secured government funding on number of his larger projects including the garden bridge, crossrail and policing (Hern 2013: Channel 4 2012). However the government did not act on the recommendations of the Johnson-created London Finance Commission (2013) that suggested more funding be devolved to London.

Downing Street came to expect and accept Johnson’s regular politicised distancing (Gimson 2016). Johnson regularly confronted the government, challenging it over crime in 2008, education in 2009, housing in 2010 and over policing and the riots 2011. There was uneasiness between the Mayor and Prime Minister: despite claims Johnson and Cameron were schools friends at Eton they did not know each other very well and had a ‘chilly distance’ (Gimson 2016). Johnson frequently stole the limelight from the Prime Minister at a succession of conferences and events. Most damaging for Cameron, Johnson broke Conservative party policy in calling for a referendum on the EU from 2009 onwards and also became a champion for lower tax, twin areas where Johnson would curry favour with backbench Conservative MPs who would vote in a leadership election (Gimson 2016).

Conclusion

As local leaders, Livingstone and Johnson used a mixture of power, publicity and policy to carve a space for the new Mayoral office and achieve change. The Mayoralty of London has indeed been both ‘strong’ and ‘weak’ (Sweeting 2002). Given the institutional constraints, the two mayors used their power as local leaders along the same set of areas: their notable policies lay primarily in transport, with similar progress in planning. It proved more difficult to deal with shared and wicked issues such as housing. Both Mayors also pushed at and stretched the institutional limits through strategy, personalised policy and coalition building. There was a noted tendency or drift towards certain areas but also conflict with central government and London’s boroughs—though the latter was somewhat neutralised by Johnson.

As predicted, the institutional weaknesses were partly reversed by use of the media, and here both Livingstone and Johnson proved adept at using the media to pursue their agenda and ambitions—and used the Mayoralty itself as a platform for their views. The two mayor’s skills were key in carving distinct ‘London’ approaches and positions, with sufficient flexible appeal. Both also drew on their image as a rebel to create difference and distinction. Ken and Boris both cultivated a cult of personality and attention and a personalised approach: both Livingstone and Johnson proved ‘skilled practitioners of PR as an inherently flirtatious mode of communication, yet both adopt different styles of applying it’ (Yates 2010, 17).
Their mandate and vision also 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. There was no equivalent for the more cautious Boris. Although Johnson also championed ‘signature’ issues but these were less innovative. Livingstone was experienced but divisive, tending to polarise opinion as he had done his entire career and became bogged down in controversy and scandal. Johnson by contrast was popular cross-party-and keen to remain so. The different media treatment was perhaps key: Livingstone 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).

The two mayors governing approaches and style differed. Livingstone’s direct and extensive time in office experience contrasted sharply with Johnson who delegated and distanced himself. Livingstone had a serious and set political identity whereas Johnson adopted a more post-ideological, ambiguous position, partly out of ambition (Yates 2010). Given his ambition, Johnson used the platform and institution for publicity and staking for positions rather than concrete policies-his conflicts were more confected than Livingstone’s. Livingstone’s London was a platform for personalised change- Johnson for personal ambition.

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