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## UK CONSERVATIVES START RACE TO REPLACE THERESA MAY

- 10.06.2019

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Deutsche Welle (10 June 2019)

Eleven candidates are vying for the leadership of Britain's oldest political party, and the keys to 10 Downing Street. Brexit brought down Theresa May and is expected to be the dominant debate among potential successors.

Conservative members of the UK parliament will on Monday see the confirmed list of their colleagues who want the top party job when nominations close at 5 p.m. (1600 UTC). The party's 1922 committee of backbenchers will then list the candidates who have made it through to the first vote on Thursday afternoon.

A record 11 candidates are challenging for the top post after former leader and still Prime Minister Theresa May sent in her letter of resignation on Friday.

Heading the pack to win the vote are:

former Foreign Secretary and London mayor Boris Johnson  
current Foreign Secretary Jeremy Hunt  
former Leader of the House of Commons Andrea Leadsom  
current Environment Secretary Michael Gove.

Boris Johnson is the bookmakers' favorite to become Britain's next prime minister. "BoJo" is widely tipped following stints as mayor of London and as foreign secretary in Theresa May's government. The 54-year-old has threatened to refuse to pay the UK's agreed debts to the EU unless the withdrawal agreement is changed.

### How does the process work?

Due to the high number of applicants, there will be several rounds of voting among the party's 313 lawmakers to narrow the field.

Two remaining candidates will then go forward to a runoff vote among the party membership, which is believed to number about 150,000, but there are no published and audited records to verify the figure.

## **Whittling down the numbers**

Campaigning among the candidates on policies and promises has been mixed with revelations about their behavior, leading to doubts they can garner support.

Michael Gove's challenge is in the balance after a new book revealed he had taken cocaine on several occasions when working as a journalist 20 years ago.

Johnson also admitted in a GQ interview in 2007 to trying cocaine and cannabis at university.

Hunt said he had a "cannabis lassi" in India, Leadsom smoked cannabis at university. Dominic Raab admitted taking cannabis as a student; Rory Stewart smoked opium in Afghanistan; a friend of Matt Hancock's said he "tried cannabis a few times," while Esther McVey told the BBC she had "tried some pot." Savid Javid, Mark Harper and Sam Gyimah have denied ever taking drugs.

## **May's downfall**

Brexit was the cause of May's downfall after she failed to get the Withdrawal Bill through parliament three times.

Appealing to the hardline Brexiteers in the Conservative party membership, the candidates have all claimed they can present a better Brexit than May. Several are threatening to take the UK out of Europe at the end of October, without an agreement. Johnson is saying he would refuse to pay the UK's agreed debts to the EU during its membership.

## **What happens next**

Once Conservative MPs hold their votes this week, the final two candidates will present themselves to the party membership in a series of meetings over the coming weeks. Party members will then send in their votes.

A decision is expected by the end of July, just in time for the new leader to make a statement in the House of Commons before the assembly closes for a summer break in August. It will be back in session at the start of September.

After a shrill referendum campaign, nearly 52 percent of British voters opted to leave the EU on June 24. Polls had shown a close race before the vote with a slight lead for those favoring remaining in the EU. Conservative British Prime Minister David Cameron, who had campaigned for Britain to stay, acknowledged the "will of the British people" and resigned the following morning.