

Boris Johnson Accused of ‘Power Grab’ over Scotland’s Post-Brexit Powers

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*The First Minister of Scotland, **Nicola Sturgeon**, has lambasted the British government over reports that it may control rights over ‘[state aid](#)’ after Brexit. ‘State aid’, which allows a government to subsidise companies, is currently controlled by the EU, but Holyrood had assumed that it would gain control of this area of legislation post-Brexit. Not if Westminster has anything to do with it, it seems. In what already being termed a ‘power grab’ by the SNP’s Ian Blackford, London may try to seize control of this and other responsibilities, according to a report in the [Financial Times](#). In response to the article, Nicola Sturgeon said such a move would be a ‘full-scale assault on devolution’ and that it would only further ‘boost support for independence’. The newspaper has since published another article warning of the threat to the UK of such actions, stating ‘the union’s future is at stake’.*

This is no exaggeration. To date, the pandemic has driven a wedge between the devolved nations, with Nicola Sturgeon forging her own path out of lockdown. Scotland may have stood united with England at the beginning of the coronavirus crisis, but as time went on, and more doubt was cast upon Westminster’s handling of the pandemic, Sturgeon began to diverge from London’s policy making. Providing her own daily press conferences, the Scottish leader made it clear that she wasn’t prepared to lay responsibility for the crisis at Boris Johnson’s door. When Boris changed the messaging from ‘Stay At Home’ to ‘Stay Alert’, Sturgeon didn’t. When he lifted lockdown and sent kids back to school before the summer break, Sturgeon didn’t. And now, despite the wearing of face masks being compulsory in Scotland, Johnson has not followed suit. In the competition of who has handled the pandemic better, Nicola Sturgeon is winning.

The [Financial Times](#) is critical of Johnson’s ‘top-down approach’ which risks England being seen as the ‘bullying big brother’. It acknowledges the fact that the SNP is set to win next May’s elections by a landslide and that support for independence is at the highest level ever. Without a doubt Sturgeon’s performance during the pandemic has boosted the nationalist cause and this latest issue of state aid will only attract more followers. The newspaper calls on Boris Johnson to negotiate with the other devolved nations or risk the break-up of the United Kingdom.

But does Boris really care? Nothing the Prime Minister has said or done to date indicates that Scottish independence bothers him. During his last official visit to Scotland, long before coronavirus took hold, Johnson was coined ‘back-door Boris’ after leaving Nicola Sturgeon’s residence via the back exit as if to avoid confronting protestors outside. He’s not liked north of the border and the feeling is quite possibly mutual. Whilst editor of the Spectator magazine, for example, Johnson published several articles which derided Scots, comparing the job of Scottish MP to having a “political disability” and stating that former PM Gordon

Brown should not become Prime Minister” not just because he is a gloomadon-popping, interfering, high-taxing complicator of life, but mainly because he is a Scot, and government by a Scot is just not conceivable in the current constitutional context.” The SNP in the past have [said](#) that Johnson showed ‘absolute contempt for Scotland’, a label which to date the Eton and Oxbridge educated Prime MInister has done nothing to refute.

The reality is that Westminster is currently being led by an elite that feels accountable to no-one. Throughout the pandemic there has been one rule for them and another for the masses. The Prime Minister’s right-hand man, Dominic Cummings has still not been reprimanded for violating the lockdown restrictions his very government imposed. Boris Johnson’s own father was caught recently visiting his villa in Greece, once again contradicting government guidelines. By contrast, Nicola Sturgeon sacked the Scottish Chief Medical Officer, Catherine Calderwood, when she was caught miles away from her permanent residence during lockdown. Some may question the significance of such actions, but it’s the little things that count.

And all these small, seemingly insignificant differences in the way Scotland has handled the pandemic are already having an impact. Sturgeon’s cautious approach to the lifting of lockdown has resulted in far fewer deaths to coronavirus – recently Scotland went 5 consecutive days without any fatalities to the disease – whereas England continues to see hundreds of deaths per day. The northern nation has been [praised](#) for its approach by leading epidemiologists, as it has been recognised that the border with England could in fact be a threat to it maintaining a Covid-free environment.

All this will be taken into account by voters in any future referendum on independence. Fear is a strong driving force, and any nation which emerges from this pandemic will think very carefully about any alliance which puts its population at risk of contracting such a virus again.

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