

Humza Yousaf – new SNP Leader and Scotland's sixth First Minister

The drama of the leadership saga and what to expect from our new FM.

It has been two decades since an SNP leadership contest and it showed. A party which was once famous for its discipline laid all its dirty laundry out to be washed under intense public scrutiny. The drama that ensued caused despair to party faithful, gleeful hand-rubbing from political opponents and more than a little head-scratching in bemusement from those who don't live their lives in political bubbles.

The contest may have felt like it dragged on but, given the importance of the outcome for Scotland and the sudden timing of Ms Sturgeon's resignation, it was run to a surprisingly truncated timetable, leaving little opportunity for potential successors to prepare their policy platforms.

The media-friendly Humza Yousaf, quickly dubbed the 'continuity candidate', was straight out the blocks with [smiley photoshoots](#) and an endless supply of those colourful boards that politicians love to hold, giving the impression he may have had a wee bit more support than the others from people in high places within the party. By contrast, Edinburgh Eastern MSP Ash Regan struggled to get her message across at first, while the previously fancied Kate Forbes shot herself in the foot with her equal marriage comment and was left to limp her way to the line.

Amidst the low-blows and mud-slinging of the campaign, serious questions were raised by candidates over the fairness and

transparency of the party's own voting processes. Previous media reports that more than 30,000 members had skedaddled from the SNP, flatly denied by the party at the time, were found to be spot-on, leading both their Media Chief Murray Foote and Ms Sturgeon's husband, SNP Chief Executive Peter Murrell [to step down](#).

Mr Yousaf may have won the membership vote fair and square, but after so much damage to the internal structures and the wider reputation of the party, the 'continuity' tag is perhaps more of a curse than a blessing.



So what does this mean for the rest of us who suddenly find we have a new First Minister? What difference will it make to our lives?

Mr Yousaf will be the first Scot of South Asian descent and the first Muslim to take on the role of First Minister, a welcome move for diversity and inclusion in Scottish politics. The Pollok MSP made it clear he would continue the 'progressive' agenda of his predecessor, and indicated support

for the continued winding down of North Sea oil and gas. He made it likely he would be able to maintain the partnership with the Green Party in government which [was confirmed shortly](#) after the result of the election was announced.

This in turn enables a pro-independence majority at Holyrood. He appeared to roll back slightly on promises that he would challenge in court the UK Government's decision to block the Gender Recognition Reform Bill however, depending on legal advice. This may be a 'red line' issue for the Greens.

He has also expressed a willingness to reform the planned National Care Service, a much-criticised policy he announced himself as Health Secretary, and to compromise to exclude small businesses from the first year of the deposit return scheme that has been causing so much concern to the food and drinks industry.

During the campaign Mr Yousaf put childcare and helping parents back to work front and centre of his campaign, with the pledge of a universal £25 million-a-year "Helping Hand Fund" to assist with the costs of early years childcare for parents returning to work and childcare expansion for 1 and 2 year olds.

On housing, he declared that he would increase council tax on second homes and take action on empty properties so they would be brought back into use as housing for key workers and those who need affordable housing in rural areas.

Another eye-catching pledge was free football club membership for youngsters from deprived areas.

On independence, Mr Yousaf appears to be distancing himself from the 'de-facto' referendum policy and discussed setting up regional assemblies to discuss the way ahead.

It's certainly the beginning of a new era in Scottish politics, but whether Humza Yousaf will have the longevity of

Nicola Sturgeon or will be gone as quickly as Liz Truss, only time will tell. There is certainly no shortage of work for the new First Minister of Scotland to get his teeth into.

We wish him well in his new role.



First Minister Humza Yousaf appoints his first cabinet ©2023
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