

In the UK outgoing Prime Minister loses her absolute majority

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Results

Outgoing Prime Minister Theresa May (Conservative Party) lost her wager. Whilst she convened a snap election (early by 3 years) to assert her legitimacy, to strengthen her personal authority and to extend her majority in order to negotiate the best possible exit for the UK from the EU, the Tory leader lost the absolute majority that her party held in the House of Commons. The Conservatives lost ground in the ballot box: on 8th June they won 42.3% of the vote and took 318 seats, i.e. -13 in comparison with the previous election on 7th May 2015. 8 outgoing government ministers lost their seats.

Conversely the Labour Party, led by Jeremy Corbyn emerged strengthened in this election winning 40% of the vote and 262 seats (+30).

The Scottish National Party (SNP) the secessionist party led by Nicola Sturgeon, also suffered losses winning 3% of the vote and 35 seats (-21). The party achieved a record result in 2015. But surprisingly however the SNP electorate this time round preferred the Conservatives to Labour to whom they are close however. With 13 seats the Tories led in Scotland with Ruth Davidson as the party leader, thereby becoming Scotland's second biggest party with their highest result since 1983. The LibDems led by Tim Farron improved their number of seats, taking 7.40% of the vote and 12 seats (+ 4).

To stay as head of the government and to win a majority in the House of Commons, Prime Minister Theresa May has chosen joint forces (agreement on parliamentary support but not a government coalition) with the Democratic Ulster Party (DUP), a unionist movement which defends the interests of the Protestant community in Northern Ireland and led by Arlene Foster. This party won 0.9% of the vote and 10 seats (+2).

The DUP is said to have achieved a promise from the Tories stipulating that there will be no special status for Northern Ireland in the negotiations over the Brexit (we should recall that 56% of the electorate in Northern Ireland voted to remain in the EU).

The UK Independence Party (UKIP) led by Paul Nuttall lost its only seat in the House of Commons. Since it campaigned for the UK's withdrawal from the EU it is now suffering from the majority voting method but especially it has lost its reason for being.

Finally Sinn Fein (SF), a republican, nationalist Irish party led by Gerry Adams won 0.7% of the vote and 7 seats (+3); Plaid Cymru (PC), a Welsh regionalist party led by Leanne Wood, 0.5% of the vote and 4 seats (+ 1) and the Green Party of England and Wales (G) led by Caroline Lucas and Jonathan Bartley 1.3% of the vote and 1 seat (=).

Turnout was one of the highest since the general elections in May 1997. It totalled 68.7% i.e. +2.60 points more in comparison with the election on 7th May 2015.

Results of the General Election of 8th June 2017 in the UK

Turnout: 68.70%

Political Parties	Number of votes won	% of votes won	Number of seats
Conservative Party (Conservative)	13 632 914	42.30	318
Labour Party (Labour)	12 874 985	40	262
Scottish National Party (SNP)	977 569	3	35
Liberal Democrats (Lib-Dem)	2 371 772	7.40	12
Democratic Ulster Party (DUP)	292 316	0.90	10
Sinn Fein (SF)	238 915	0.70	7
Plaid Cymru (PC)	164 466	0.50	4
The Green Party of England and Wales (G)	525 371	1.60	1
Others	887 551	3.60	2

Source : BBC <http://www.bbc.com/news/election/2017/results>

Theresa May did not pass comment on her failure. *"I shall form a government. This government will guide the country through the vital negotiations over the Brexit which will start in just 10 days' time. And now, back to work!"* she declared.

Many political analysts believe that Theresa May led a poor electoral campaign. It was severely disrupted by two terrorist attacks the responsibility for which was claimed by Islamic State, the first being in Manchester on 22nd May, which led to the deaths of 22 and injured 116; the second occurred in London on 3rd June (8 deaths, 2 disappeared and 48 injured). After these two attacks many voices were raised to challenge the austerity policy undertaken by the Conservatives since 2010. Between 2010 and 2016, around 20,000 police jobs were effectively cut; the police budget was also reduced by 20%. At the time Theresa May was Home Secretary in the government led by David Cameron. *"Enough is enough. There is too much tolerance of extremism in our country,"* stressed the head of government. After the attack in London she also said something quite surprising: *"We must not live as separate, segregated communities but as a united kingdom,"* seeming to challenge British multiculturalism. Jeremy Corbyn called in vain for Theresa May's resignation. *"Austerity must stop at the threshold of the emergency services and the police stations. We cannot have low cost protection and healthcare,"* said the Labour leader, promising the immediate creation of 10,000

police jobs and the employment of a 1000 additional agents in the information services.

But from the very beginning however Theresa May undoubtedly made the mistake of focusing her campaign on her personality and rejecting debate with the other candidates and sometimes refusing to answer to the media. She appeared over confident and, a fatal mistake, she neglected her labour rival. *"A 'file' woman, Theresa May has no charisma, and is ill at ease with both the public and journalists. She has never been involved in public debate before,"* noted Chris Bickerton. *"Self-assured, disdainful of her rival, her refusal to take part in the TV debates only increased her image as a leader who fears confrontation,"* maintained Philippe Marlière, professor of political science at the University College of London.

She also focused on the Brexit and as a result allowed Labour every latitude to cover other issues, notably socio-economic questions. She defended a protective, social state but without really convincing the British in the wake of the austerity policy that has been implemented since 2010. *"The electorate are not voting Tory for social reasons,"* stresses Chris Bickerton, a political expert from the University of Cambridge.

Finally, the latter also announced a reform of social aid that provided that pensioners' who were property owners estimated

at over £100,000 would have to fund their dependency via an inheritance tax. This project disturbed even the most loyal sympathisers of the Conservative Party.

Whilst all political analysts thought that the Labour Party was in the abyss, the latter was able to surf on the shortfalls in Theresa May's electoral campaign and finally achieved a result that no one would have imagined just a few weeks ago. Jeremy Corbyn made the right choice by placing emphasis on socio-economic issues and by offering reforms supported by many British, such as the renationalisation of the railways and the postal services and even fee free higher education, which remobilised the Labour electorate. The Labour leader's result, higher than predicted in the polls recalls that of Jean-Luc Mélenchon (France Unbowed, FI) in the first round of the French Presidential election on 23rd April last.

Jeremy Corbyn managed to establish a real relationship with the British public, which his rival has never been able to do. At one moment in the electoral campaign the dynamic changed sides. After this the two terrorist attacks forced Theresa May to return to a more traditional campaign of Tories vs Labour, which she had tried her very best to avoid.

According to the exit polls Labour owe their results to the youngest in the electorate (18-24), who turned out in strength and mainly voted for the opposition. Nearly three-quarters of them (72%) went to vote on 8th June (there were only four in ten in the last general election on 7th May 2015); the response on the part of the young people can undoubtedly be explained by the "shock" that some felt in the choice made by some of their fellow-countrymen to quit the EU on 23rd June 2016.

In 2010, Labour fell victim, amongst other things, to its length of time in office; five years later in 2015 the British undoubtedly

voted more for there to be a referendum on their country's exit of the EU promised by the Tories rather than voting for the Conservative Party itself.

Many political analysts believe that the British voted in expression of their wish for a "soft Brexit". *"I believe that the majority of those who voted for the Brexit on 23rd June 2016 did so hoping for an exit of the EU whilst remaining close to it, with participation in the single market and customs union. The option of the hard Brexit privileged by Theresa May was not what they wanted,"* declared Simon Hix, professor of political science at the London School of Economics (LSE). Theresa May's counter performance, supporting an exit of the single market, the end of customs union and free movement, now leads a relative majority in the House of Commons, but this is strengthening however the supporters of a hard Brexit within the Tory party.

Without a doubt the UK has emerged weakened after the general elections on 8th June. Just 10 days before the launch of negotiations by London with its 27 European partners over Brexit (planned for 19th June), the country will be difficult to govern. *"We do not know when the negotiations will start but we do know when they have to end (29th March 2019 since the British government triggered the withdrawal clause, article 50 of the Treaty on European Union on 29th March last)"* recalled the President of the European Council Donald Tusk.

"Theresa May will not be able to stay in power, and she will have to resign; she has lost all credibility within her own party," indicated Simon Tilford and John Springford, of the think tank Centre for European Reform. Many political analysts are indeed anticipating further elections deeming that the British Prime Minister will not be able to govern whilst the coming months will be vital for the future of the country.

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