

Theresa May:
Can she strengthen
her position?



Where is Britain heading?

Theresa May hat mit ihrer Ankündigung der vorgezogenen Neuwahl nicht nur die Öffentlichkeit überrascht. LORRAINE MALLINDER untersucht die Gründe dafür und die Reaktionen anderer politischer Akteure.

ADVANCED

One year after Britain voted to leave the EU, it is again going to the polls. Prime Minister Theresa May's decision to call a **snap election** on 8 June shocked the nation. Yet, in the context of Brexit, her move makes perfect sense.

May presented her decision as a bid for authority. With her political enemies trying to destroy her plans, she was left with little choice but to look for a mandate from the British people to negotiate a Brexit deal. So who are these enemies?

According to May, they are the game-playing opposition parties at Westminster. But given that a **cross-party** majority of MPs backed her Article 50 plans, her claims are unconvincing.

It is far more likely that the real enemies are within her own party: the hard-line Brexiteers who would have Britain drive over the cliff without a deal. By increasing the party's majority, she will be able to silence the rebels and make whatever compromises are needed over the coming two years.

However, last month more enemies appeared on the scene. Emotions ran high after details of a meal with European Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker were leaked to a German newspaper. May's unrealistic demands reportedly left Juncker feeling "10 times more sceptical" about negotiations.

May dismissed the talk as "Brussels gossip", but went on to speak of "threats" from Europe timed to affect the result of the general election. Playing the role of a "strong and stable" leader capable of standing up to Brussels could win her more votes.

This said, opposition parties have everything to play for.

“There will be consequences for the UK of leaving the EU.”

Theresa May

The Liberal Democrats aim to **bounce back** from their terrible performance in the 2015 election — a result of their disastrous five-year coalition with the Tories. Flying the flag for remainers (pro-Europeans), they want a referendum on the final Brexit deal — and this could end up keeping Britain in the EU.

For Labour, still on life support after its post-Brexit implosion, there's nothing to lose. Jeremy Corbyn promises to scrap May's Brexit plans and work for a softer Brexit that priori-

tizes single-market benefits.

For the Scottish National Party (SNP), it's an opportunity to legitimize their calls for a second independence referendum.

The results of local elections last month suggest that May's gamble could **pay off**, leaving her free to negotiate without looking over her shoulder.

If the British public has learned anything since last year's Brexit vote, however, it is that politics is a fast and **fickle** business. **Complacency** can be dangerous.

bounce back

[baʊns 'bæk] *ifml.*
 ► wieder auf die Beine kommen

complacency

[kəm'plɛsənsi]
 ► Selbstgefälligkeit

cross-party

[krɒs 'pɑ:ti]
 ► parteiübergreifend

fickle

['fɪkəl]
 ► unbeständig

pay off [peɪ 'ɒf] ► sich auszahlen

snap election

['snæp i,lekʃən]
 ► vorgezogene Neuwahl

THE PLAYERS

Theresa May, British prime minister

It was while walking in Wales before Easter that Theresa May decided to call a snap election. The move seemed out of character. In the past, expressing her dislike of “political games”, she had said there would be no early election. But as we are discovering, May is a dark horse, particularly when it comes to her plans for Brexit. A reluctant remainer, she at first seemed to be on the side of the hardliners, announcing that Brexit meant Brexit. Most people guessed that this meant a “hard Brexit”.

Later, her view appeared to change. As other Tories tried to sell the fantasy of a post-Brexit utopia, she warned that the UK would have to play by rules it no longer had any role in making. Brexit would have “consequences”. However, her insistence that “no deal is better than a bad deal” worries moderates. Either way, in calling a snap election, she has caught her rivals everywhere on the hop.

Nicola Sturgeon, Scottish first minister

In March, Nicola Sturgeon fired the starting gun for a second referendum on independence for Scotland,

after it became clear that Theresa May wasn't listening to her demands for a Brexit deal that would keep the country in the single market. May was apparently caught by surprise. But now, in a move perhaps designed to show Sturgeon who is boss, May is forcing Scotland to show its hand.

Sturgeon is an agile politician who has run rings around May since last year. Indeed, she is often presented as May's nemesis. The more May ignores Scotland, the more powerful Sturgeon's case for independence becomes.

Sturgeon, though, has been ambiguous about her plans for Scotland if it were to become independent. Would it break free to rejoin the EU or merely remain in the single market?

Tim Farron, Liberal Democrat leader

Who is Tim Farron? How old is Tim Farron? Is Tim Farron a Christian?

Typing Tim Farron's name into Google when the election was announced, these questions were among the top results. The leader of the Liberal Democrats, 47 years old, is indeed an evangelical Christian. Initially, this was a source of curiosity for many. Despite his support for equal marriage rights, people

agile ['ædʒaɪl]
► gewandt

ambiguous
[,æm'biɡjuəs]
► uneindeutig

character: out of ~
['kærəktə] ► untypisch

dark horse [ˌdɑ:k 'hɔ:s]
► stilles Wasser

hand: show one's ~
[hænd]
► die Karten aufdecken

hop: catch sb. on the ~
[hɒp] UK ifml.
► jmdn. überrumpeln

initially [ɪ'nɪʃli]
► anfangs, ursprünglich

reluctant [rɪ'lʌktənt]
► zögerlich

*“If you want
a Britain that
is open,
tolerant and
united, this is
your chance.”*

Tim Farron



wanted to know what he thought about gay sex. For the record, he said he did not think it was a sin.

Back to Brexit: Farron is pushing for the remainder vote. Once a Eurosceptic, he has now come out clearly against Brexit, promising a referendum on the final deal. If the British public votes against it, he says, Brexit can be reversed. With the Article 50 process for leaving the EU now under way, it's unclear whether Britain could be automatically readmitted. Antonio Tajani, president of the European Parliament, has, however, said that the country would be welcomed back with open arms. Right now, the Liberal Democrats have only nine seats in Westminster — a result of their disastrous five-year coalition with the Tories. But a recent surge in the party's membership gives it a little cause for hope.

Jeremy Corbyn, Labour leader

For some, JC is the saviour of the left. For others, he's a political train crash in slow motion. In the media, he is mostly portrayed as the latter, an irresponsible idealist, casual to the point of carelessness. Gosh! He doesn't even bother to wear a tie half the time.

Eurosceptic at heart, "Jezza" was criticized for his lukewarm campaign against Brexit last year. Some say it's hard to see a difference between his Brexit policy and the Tories' plans. But with his focus on market access and jobs, it seems likely that he would deliver a much softer Brexit. Many say Labour can't win under Corbyn. But he is steady and rides the negative media coverage with Zen detachment. And despite countless predictions of his demise, he is still there.

THE ISSUES

This is no ordinary election. Voters will be considering the usual issues, such as jobs and growth, while at the same time trying to understand what's important in the Brexit negotiations.

Hard or soft Brexit — or no Brexit at all

Brexit means Brexit, but as with cooking an egg, one may ask whether it is to be hard or soft. The question has been endlessly debated in the country since last year's referendum. Now, with a general election coming up, it looks pretty scrambled.

A soft Brexit could mean that Britain continues to be part of the single market, with preferential trade conditions in exchange for flexibility on freedom of

coverage ['kʌvərɪdʒ]

► Berichterstattung

demise [di'maɪz] ► Abtreten

detachment [di'tætʃmənt]

► Distanziertheit

gosh ['gɒʃ] *ifml.* ► meine Güte

latter: the ~ ['lætə] ► Letztere(r)

lukewarm [ˌluːk'wɔːm]

► lauwarm; hier: indifferent

record: for the ~ ['rekɔːd]

► um das klarzustellen

reverse [ri'vɜːs]

► umkehren, rückgängig machen

saviour ['seɪvjə] ► Retter(in)

scrambled ['skræmbld]

► durcheinander; hier: wie Rührei

slow motion [ˌsləʊ'məʊʃn]

► Zeitlupe

surge [sɜːdʒ] ► rascher Anstieg



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movement. It's not the great escape, as imagined by passionate Brexiteers. Britain could still be following the same old rules — and paying for the privilege.

At the other end of the scale is a hard Brexit. In the most extreme scenario, Britain would trade on WTO rules — an expensive and, frankly, unrealistic option. The temptation of giving up negotiations will no doubt be strong, but the country's status as a centre for financial services is too important for diplomats to flounce off without a deal.

However, discussions cannot begin until Britain agrees to pay its divorce bill, which will possibly be as high as €100 billion. Britain has already rejected that figure, but Brussels looks set to play hardball on this.

The European Court of Justice

Now that Britain is “taking back control”, as we heard endlessly during last year's Brexit campaign, there will be no more of the Euro court's crazy rulings. That, at least, was what people understood after Britain voted to leave the EU. Withdrawal from the ECJ's jurisdiction is one of Theresa May's “red line” issues — no compromise possible.

Brussels, though, is determined that the court will be the ultimate authority on any deal and will rule on matters such as EU citizens' rights long after Brexit day. It seems that if the UK wants to continue to have some sort of trade relationship with the EU, it will also have to bend to ECJ rulings. Even if Britain leaves the EU, therefore, it may possibly find it hard to free itself from the ECJ.

EU citizens' rights

What will happen to the 3.3 million EU citizens living in Britain

after Brexit? The Tories sidestepped the question in their legal preparations for negotiations. In the panic that followed, Theresa May did say she was determined to guarantee rights as soon as possible. It is clear, though, that she was waiting until rights for the 4.5 million UK citizens in Europe were secured. In the bitter battle ahead, there will be no freebies.

For Brussels, it's a priority. The European Parliament is threatening to veto deals that do not protect citizens' rights. A major factor will be the cut-off date for rights. Brussels is keen to secure freedom of movement with full rights up to the actual Brexit day. It's in Britain's interests to agree. The National Health Service is just one sector that could face collapse without EU workers. A deal on this is a no-brainer.

International trade

Nearly half of Britain's exports now go to the EU. If that relationship changes, the country will need to find a lot of replacement markets. The US is viewed as a big win that would increase Britain's influence worldwide. News that US President Donald Trump was giving the EU priority over Britain — German Chancellor Angela Merkel allegedly charmed the orange one on her visit to Washington earlier this year — therefore came as a blow.

Britain is also looking to the 52 Commonwealth countries. In 2014, they received only eight per cent of British exports. But, with a bigger share of global GDP than the EU, it's an attractive market.

The drive has, however, got off to a bad start, with British officials allegedly calling it “Empire 2.0” among themselves. This office in-joke indicates a careless arrogance that will go down very badly among Britain's former colonies.



“I desperately want Scotland to be an independent country.”

Nicola Sturgeon

allegedly [ə'ledʒɪdli]

► angeblich

bend to sth. ['bend tu]

► sich einer Sache beugen

cut-off date

['kʌt ɒf ,deɪt] ► Stichtag

flounce off [flaʊns 'ɒf]

► hinausrauschen

frankly ['fræŋkli]

► offen gesagt

freebie ['fri:bi] *ifml.*

► Gratisgeschenk

GDP (gross domestic product) [ˌgrɒs dɒ

mestɪk 'prɒdʌkt] ► BIP

(Bruttoinlandsprodukt)

keen [ki:n] ► sehr daran

interessiert

no-brainer [ˌnəʊ 'breɪnə]

N. Am. *ifml.* ► hier: eine Selbstverständlichkeit

orange one ['ɒrɪndʒ wʌn]

► Spitzname für Donald Trump (in Anspielung auf seine Haarfarbe)

sidestep ['saɪdstep]

► ausweichen

temptation [ˌtemp'teɪʃən]

► Versuchung

withdrawal [wɪð'drɔ:əl]

► Rückzug, Austritt

“Labour will be offering the country an effective alternative.”

Jeremy Corbyn



The disunited kingdom

Though many Scots don't realize it, the disintegration of the UK may be Theresa May's biggest nightmare. Leaving the EU is one thing. Ending up with the legacy of losing the three-century-old United Kingdom would be quite another.

In 2014, Scotland decided to stick with the UK to preserve its place in the European Union. Now it finds itself being dragged out of the EU against its will. But would it break with the UK over this matter?

On the one hand, May is in a corner. Brexiters do not have a monopoly of the arguments about sovereignty and self-determination; and suggestions that Scotland would be giving up its largest market if it leaves Britain ring hollow. After all, Britain itself is leaving the world's biggest consumer market.

On the other hand, Scots are not exactly crying out for a referendum right now. And it's unclear how many would settle for single-market access over full EU membership. With Labour and the Liberal Democrats offering alternative Brexit scenarios, a closer relationship with Brussels no longer depends on Scottish independence.

The Scottish government has already requested a referendum, so the option will still be on the table. But May will be hoping that the election breaks nationalist momentum and neutralizes the threat.

POSSIBLE SCENARIOS

The big question is, what would happen if Brexit could be stopped? All hopes of that rest on the Lib Dems, the only party to have given a clear pledge. But they will have to pull off a spectacular recovery, which seems unlikely.

In Scotland, the SNP is seen as the vehicle that could secure a closer relationship with the EU, but many remainers who voted against independence may find it difficult to place their faith in the nationalists.

What about a coalition that removes the Tories from power? Sturgeon, the first minister of Scotland, hinted at the idea of a progressive alliance between the SNP, Labour and the Lib Dems. The suggestion was rejected by Labour and the Lib Dems and mocked by the Tories. In 2015, the Tories used the threat of an SNP alliance with Labour to regain power.

A Tory win will give Theresa May the coronation she is hoping for, cementing her authority in Westminster and her own party. May's claims that this will also strengthen her hand in Brussels, however, might be a bit far-fetched. By the time negotiations get under way properly — probably after the German elections in September — this strange blip in British political life may well be nothing but a distant memory.

Ultimately, however, Theresa May would be free to lead Britain into the unknown — her way. ✍️

blip [blɪp]

► Momentaufnahme

coronation [ˌkɒrəˈneɪʃən]

► Krönung

far-fetched [fɑː fetʃt]

► weit hergeholt

hollow [ˈhɒləʊ]

► hohl, leer

legacy [ˈlegəsi]

► Erbe, Vermächtnis

mock [mɒk] ► verspotten

nightmare [ˈnaɪtmɛə]

► Alptraum

pledge [pledʒ]

► Zusicherung,

Versprechen

preserve [prɪˈzɜːv]

► erhalten

self-determination

[ˌself diːtɜːmɪˈneɪʃən]

► Selbstbestimmung