

## Theresa May's bold election call is all about securing the best Brexit deal for Britain



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Theresa May has made a bold decision to call for an election CREDIT: ANDY RAIN/EPA

Seldom has a prime minister emerged from 10 Downing Street to make an announcement so utterly and completely justified and correct. I wrote in this paper six weeks ago that the case for an early general election was very strong indeed, and the arguments for that have only become stronger since then.

The way Theresa May has made this decision is instructive about how she reaches her own conclusions: quietly, privately and firmly.

Throughout her front-bench career she has always wanted to think things through herself, according to a timetable of her own. She does not operate by leaks, hints, nudges and rumour. Instead she goes perfectly quiet, and then emerges with a very big move indeed.

Such thoughtful but bold decision-making is, of itself, a reason for voters to ensure Theresa May remains prime minister after June 8. No other party leader in the UK is ready to be prime minister, and most of them won't ever be. Nevertheless, Conservative supporters now have seven weeks to remind voters that unless they actually get themselves to a polling station, Jeremy Corbyn will become prime minister. Ensuring a high turnout will be important in an election in which many people will rapidly conclude there is no serious alternative to the existing government.

In that case, why bother with an election? The answer is that it is the job of a prime minister to anticipate the struggles and events of the future. My argument, when I made the case for an early election, was that trouble is coming, particularly in 2019 when ministers will bring back to Parliament whatever terms have been agreed with the European Union. Any deal, even a good one, would be at the mercy of manoeuvres designed to frustrate the decision made by the British people in the referendum last year.

Labour have been positioning themselves to vote against the exit terms without actually opposing Brexit itself, the only way of uniting themselves, but something they will now have to explain in the coming campaign. Liberal Democrats hold in contempt the views expressed by the majority of the population. Scottish nationalists just want things to go as badly as possible so they can pursue their agenda of destroying the United Kingdom. The House of Lords was going to be able to say that implementing Brexit was in no one's election manifesto, and so they were not required to approve of its terms.

Worse still, the problems these postures create for the British Government are entirely obvious to the EU's negotiators. They know that with such strong opposition in Parliament, and only a small Conservative majority in the Commons, Her Majesty's Government is walking on thin ice. That knowledge would only encourage the EU to take up tough negotiating positions, and make it harder for the UK to get the deal it wants.

This is why there is such a strong argument in the national interest for a general election now. The best chance of a successful negotiation is for the Government to have a strong mandate from the people and a majority big enough to withstand periodic rebellions. Furthermore, a government elected on the basis of implementing the outcome of its negotiations with the EU will be in a stronger position to face down difficulties in the House of Lords.

So the objective for Conservatives is not just to win, but to win with a large enough majority to deliver a good outcome with Europe, and to send a clear message that Britain now wants to make a success of the decision it has made.

I hope that the Conservative manifesto will also include the repeal of the Fixed Term Parliaments Act, so that the right of the prime minister of the day to call an election – understandably removed during a coalition – is restored.

There will, of course, be many other reasons to vote Conservative. Our economy is doing well. The UK can make sure it has more stable leadership than most other major western countries. And other parties have little to offer – even Ukip now has to face the truth that voting anything other than Conservative will endanger its main political objective.

But the overriding purpose of calling an election now is to maximise unity and strength ahead of a testing time. Theresa May deserves our thanks for having the courage and clarity to make this, the right and necessary decision.







