

# The Telegraph

## By refusing Nicola Sturgeon, Theresa May is speaking for the majority of Scottish people

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19 MARCH 2017 • 10:28PM

Alex Salmond has oft been known as a gambler. The former SNP leader's love of a punt even delivered him a long-running column in a tabloid newspaper as a racing tipster.

His successor, Nicola Sturgeon, was supposed to be cut from a different cloth – more cautious and preferring to puzzle a challenge out from every angle and seek advice, rather than simply pronounce. Well, cleaning up after the boss as his long-suffering deputy for 10 years will do that to a woman. Or at least so went the received wisdom.

Which is why Monday's Bute House drama – [a press conference in front of double saltires and the sort of mantelpiece urns your granny had in her "good" room](#) – caught many UK newsrooms on the hop. Delivered with the staccato syntax designed to show that the First Minister really means it, she threw the whole SNP playbook at the event. Complaints over process (Brexit negotiations through the Joint Ministerial Council), grievance over perceived slights (Theresa May hadn't told her if Article 50 was being triggered the next day – it wasn't), an impossible bar set precisely so that opponents will fail it (demands that one part of the UK stay in the single market while the rest does not) and a conclusion – were any required – that the only answer to the whole sorry saga was independence for Scotland. Oh, and Nicola would be picking the time, the question, the franchise and the colour of the ballot paper, thank you very much.

We've been here before. In the last two years everything from renewing the Trident submarine fleet to the possibility of Boris Johnson becoming prime minister have been cited by nationalists as possible grounds for dragging Scotland back to a question we already answered in record numbers. The threats have become so repetitive that they now have their own internet meme with the hashtag [#indyref2trigger](#).

To be clear: we were always coming to this point. Despite the countless times both Mr Salmond and Ms Sturgeon intoned to the nation that their vote in the referendum of 2014 would last for a generation or a lifetime, work on overturning Scotland's decision started the morning after the No vote was delivered. Mr Salmond may have taken a leaf out of Donald Trump's book by flatly denying any such assurances were made, but video footage of countless speeches, debates, interviews, press calls and photo ops with six-foot banners tells a different story. While the SNP may wish to erase such minor details from the public consciousness with a simple flat denial, the people of Scotland are not so easily gulled.

We know what was promised the last time around – that our voice would be heard and respected. We also know the promises the SNP have made in the months and years since. I can't tell you how many times I've watched Nicola Sturgeon in a TV studio earnestly tell the nation that it really is OK to vote SNP in one election or another, because she solemnly vows that unless lots of ordinary voters change their mind and decide they want Scottish independence after all, she wouldn't have the right to call for another referendum and drag us all back to the divisions of the past. She can even deliver such pronouncements with a straight face. It's a skill.

Yet here's the rub. Significant numbers of Scottish voters haven't changed their minds. Yes, there are some from both camps that have switched sides, but [support for independence or remaining in the UK is broadly where it was on polling day back in September 2014](#). In the last week alone, three polls by three different polling companies with three different methodologies have taken the temperature of Scotland (Survation, YouGov and Panelbase). Each shows majority support for Scotland staying in the UK, with the two most recent demonstrating even greater support now than the 10-point margin that was recorded less than three years ago.

So, in the absence of a popular surge in support for independence, the SNP has decided to invent one. Brexit is claimed as the trigger, but it is really only the most recent excuse. And how could it be anything other than an excuse when Ms Sturgeon says leaving the EU is grounds for another vote, but won't confirm that an independent Scotland would even seek immediate re-entry to the EU?

Eight months ago, the First Minister stood at the same podium in Bute House with the same flags, the same urns and the same mantelpiece as Monday's announcement. It was the morning after the Brexit vote and a bleary-eyed nation was coming to terms with the momentous result. In that context – without hesitation or reflection – Ms Sturgeon announced that she'd already instructed civil servants to draw up the necessary legislation for another independence referendum.

She put Scotland on high alert. She indicated then what her end-game would be. No Brexit discussion would truly be conducted in good faith, as Brexit itself was only a lever to the primary goal of her political career: the break-up of Britain.

She tried to co-opt the Remain votes of thousands of Scots like myself as ciphers for support for independence when they were nothing of the sort. She turned a deaf ear to [the million Scots who voted Leave](#), nearly 400,000 of whom were her own SNP supporters. And, by signalling her intent so far in advance, she allowed discussions and decisions to be made on how to present the response when she finally, inevitably, pulled the trigger.

The majority of the people of Scotland don't want independence. They don't want the decision they already made to be overturned. They don't want to be told that their original answer was wrong and it's time to do it all again. They don't want to be dragged back to the uncertainty and division that binary referenda entail. Ms Sturgeon may also find that they don't want a First Minister who acts only for her own narrow party interests and not those of the nation as a whole.

No wonder the former Labour minister Brian Wilson [was moved to write](#): "Nicola Sturgeon's unlikely success in allowing a Tory Prime Minister to speak for the great Scottish majority...is unlikely to be looked back on as her finest hour."

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