

## Total votes cast under recent leaders

The Conservatives under Mrs May polled 13.667 m votes this time.

This is more than Labour under Tony Blair at his peak in 1997 when he polled 13.518m, and more than he polled in 2001 when he had a landslide in seats – he polled just 10.724 m.votes

Theresa May's leadership at 13.667 m was well ahead of the Conservatives led by David Cameron who managed 11.34 m in 2015 and just 10.73 m in 2010 despite the banking crash under Labour.

It also is massively better than John Major in 1997 after his ERM European disaster, when he polled just 9.6m.

William Hague took the prize for the worst Conservative performance of the last half century with only 8.357m.votes. Michael Howard lifted it modestly in 2005 to 8.784 m.

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## How to govern in the new Parliament

The least bad option from here is for Mrs May to lead a Conservative government, commanding her 317 MPs. Assuming the 7 Sinn Fein MPs do not attend as before, and allowing for 1 Speaker and 3 Deputy Speakers, a party needs 320 MPs to have a majority. On most votes therefore Mrs May commanding 317 will win, as the Opposition MPs rarely all turn up and rarely all vote the same way.

There are discussions with the DUP. It seems likely the DUP will often want to support government proposals with or without an Agreement. It may be possible to reach an Agreement that effectively creates a 327 vote base for the big votes. This will not include any Conservative changes of attitude and voting behaviour towards moral and conscience issues like civil partnerships and abortion. Even without an Agreement the DUP should be willing to vote through the legislation for Brexit, and to support the government should another Opposition party bring a motion of No confidence. The government is not talking of a coalition. On Brexit there are also a few Labour Eurosceptic MPs who would never vote against it. The whole Labour party was elected on Thursday on a pledge to honour Brexit, so they have limited scope to vote against the Brexit legislation, the main Bill to be taken this year through the Commons.

I do not think another early election would solve anything. It is quite likely the voters would say they want a balanced Parliament with no overall single party majority. It is too soon for the two main parties to shift their platform enough to make a difference. In order to be taken seriously by the EU and the wider world the UK government has to accept it has sought the mandate of the people four times in the last three years in the two

constitutional referenda and in two General elections. It is high time Parliament and government now got around to implementing the wishes of the people as expressed in those democratic events. We are a democratic country with accountable politicians, not a permanent political debating society shifting our views without ever implementing them. My judgement is none of the main parties want an early election, and many voters do not favour it either.

Some, especially the BBC correspondents who seem to see themselves as makers more than reporters of news, say the Conservative party needs a Leadership election. I disagree, as do most of my Parliamentary colleagues. Whilst there are Conservatives sore at the failure to gain a majority, party members see no obvious single agreed successor and no obvious simple way of getting to a successor. Taking three months off governing now would send the wrong message to the EU and others. Theresa May has three great advantages. She did help the party win more votes than at any time since 1992, so she has the biggest personal mandate in the new Commons. She is well versed and prepped for the Brexit negotiations which must take centre stage imminently. She has more support than any rival amongst the MPs. As she says she wants to be Leader she should be supported.

It may be helpful to remind you of the rules regarding a leadership election for those who disagree with me. Unless the Leader resigns, it takes 15% of the MPs (now 48) to sign a letter requesting a vote of confidence in the Leader, and then requires 50% plus of the MPs to vote No confidence. (159 MPs). When we were pressing Mr Cameron to hold a referendum there were rumours that we would put in the then requisite number of letters. We had more than twice as many MPs wanting a referendum as we needed letters. We did not do so and saw no need to. Instead we kept him in touch with the build up of numbers for a referendum. We knew for many months we could not win the No confidence vote, so damaging him by demanding a contest without winning seemed a futile and bad idea. It was when we got to 120 MPs and said we were confident we could get to 150 that he reconsidered the Referendum and agreed to one. We did not have to explain the arithmetic to him or suggest some hotheads might seek to remove him. He was rightly not unduly worried if 45 MPs had a big disagreement with him, but knew 150 would be very dangerous.

The UK cannot allow a further delay in opening the formal negotiations on our future relationship with the EU. We have already had a long delay enforced by the Courts, and a further delay from the EU which has also spanned an election. People living here from the EU want certainty, Uk citizens on the continent want certainty, businesses want certainty. That means engaging as soon as possible and getting some decisions.

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## How did I deal with the election? A candidate's story.

Given the range of strong reactions to the campaigns and the results, I am writing today about how I responded to the national campaign and tried to run a sensible local campaign.

In the months before the election was called the question of whether we needed an early election to bring the new PM her own mandate and extend the life of Parliament well beyond the Brexit talks came up just occasionally in private meetings amongst Conservative MPs, whips and Ministers. Some wanted an early election. I always expressed the view that there was no constitutional need given the precedents of Callaghan, Major and Brown, and no pressing political need given the size of the majority. I supported the PM's view that we would not hold one.

She surprised me after Easter by calling one. I listened carefully to her statement in Downing Street and was prepared to defend her decision. I could see the obvious advantages for the government and country assuming she won an increased majority in having the new PM with her own clear mandate, and the Brexit Bill as a Manifesto bill approved by the electorate in a General Election as well as by referendum. I was also aware that there was a risk of losing, but no point in talking about that once the announcement was made. The polls and general mood made losing look fairly unlikely. I thought the period of the election was too long given the limited nature of the messages main parties wish to get out these days, and given the imminence of the Brussels talks. I worried about how the time would be filled and how the media out of boredom would try to liven up issues and messages the two main parties were not highlighting.

When Parliament broke up there was an unreal mood created by opinion polls showing a huge gap between the Labour and Conservative votes. I and other Conservative MPs went back to our constituencies saying to each other we did not believe the polls could stay like that and were bound to tighten. Some Labour MPs were saying to us they did believe the polls, and went away fearing for their jobs.

When I saw the campaign theme and materials based around strong and stable leadership I felt the need to say something more to my electors, and to remind them that the local election was still about judging a local candidate to be MP, as well as choosing a national party to govern. That meant not using the template second leaflet of the Conservative party which left far too little space to set out what an individual candidate wants to do and how they see things, but creating one of our own. I wrote about the economy, taxes, planning, transport, schools and the other leading matters that constituents had told me in emails, letters, and conversations mattered to them. I explained briefly what I was doing, what I wanted to do next and where I was seeking change.

The Conservative national campaign went well until the day of the Manifesto launch. When I read the social care and winter fuel proposals I was extremely worried. I contacted the centre and explained the dangers. I wrote a blog piece saying that I intended to consult about these proposals, stressing to people that I understood this would be a government consultation post the election, and there were clearly many important details missing from the Manifesto sketch. I promised to voice constituents' worries and concerns during the consultation if that came to pass.

It seemed to take a long time for the modification to come through, saying there would be a social care cost cap. I with others asked for details of how much, and also pressed for clarification of what would constitute healthcare available free and what would constitute social care with a charge for those with money. I also wanted a figure for what was rich enough to lose the winter fuel payment. My email box was swelled with people worried or angry about the proposals. In some cases they did not understand that under the current cross party system if you move into a care home your own home is sold and the money freed used to pay the fees, nor did all appreciate that if you stayed living in your own home Councils charged for social care all the time you have assets other than your main home. I spent time writing individual emails setting out the current system as well as what might improve it.

It also became increasingly clear during the election that Mr Corbyn's offer of so much more public spending and free offers especially to school and College students was very attractive to young voters. There was no comparable Conservative offer to young people. Telling them his whole package was unaffordable, based on corporate taxes that would not materialise on the scale envisaged and extra borrowing of Latin American proportions was not going to win over the majority, who understandably liked the idea of no student fees and written off debts. I wrote a piece on how the Labour economic policy was full of danger as well as of some good intentions.

I spent the last few days in hope that there was sufficient momentum from the early campaign and sufficient doubts about the credibility of Labour's programme to give the Conservatives a modest majority. I was well aware there was no chance of a landslide, and thought it odd the seats the Conservatives were targetting which looked far too hard to win. Near to the poll I saw the enthusiasm of young voters and sensed the pro Labour mood. It was obvious the Lib Dems were going to be badly squeezed by Labour who had the better offer for young people. Their campaign to change the Brexit decision had bombed and they were trying to get on to other issues. I wrote about the two positives I could see in what was happening – the likely rejection of a second referendum on the EU by shunning the Lib Dems, and a move away from a second Independence referendum in Scotland by improved performance of the pro Union parties there.

I had tried to get the party to run on Prosperity, not austerity. I had wanted more prominence for tax reductions for workers and savers, more messages on promoting and strengthening the recovery, more about skills, training, education and better paid jobs. I was one of those urging the promise of more money for schools in the Manifesto which we did get, but we were outbid by Labour.

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## Government use of data

I was asked about government data in the election, so I thought today I would share with you my reply:

I entirely agree that we need to improve the skills of our nation in handling and using data. The government is planning more emphasis on science, maths and data, which will be covered by new T levels as well.

I also agree that new policies should be underpinned by evidence. That is the approach I have always adopted as policy adviser and as someone involved in the national debate over major concerns.

There are issues both over the quality of data available to government and over the way some choose to interpret or use it. I myself use a lot of the economic data for the interventions I make in the national debate on public spending, economic growth and taxation. All too often the basis of a series is changed making comparison over time more difficult. There are regular changes to the back data, long after the intense political debate about the numbers has passed on. We often find the sharp political exchanges have attacked and defended wrong numbers.

The current changes being put through on inflation are an example of the complexity, with RPI giving way to CPI now giving way to a new index which includes a proxy for owner occupied housing costs which may not capture the reality. This is an example of an important index which has consequences for people's lives, as benefits are uprated and index bondholders rewarded by reference to one or other of these indices.

In some of the important figures for debate the independent officials make forecasts which can have great political significance. For example, the OBR forecast poor revenues for the almost completed 2016-17 year in the November Autumn Statement, only to have to put back £8bn of revenue they left out from the November forecast in the March update. It is a good job the government did not respond to the November figures by cutting spending or increasing taxes to keep the deficit on target, as it turns out it was not off target as I argued at the time. There are always dangers in official figures that require judgements or rely on models which have not in the past accurately reflected what has happened.

The UK economic figures are subject to revision for many years after the date to which they apply. It reminds us that decision takers often do have to make judgements without access to proper data. That is another area where a democratic system has its advantages. If the decision takers are in touch with those most affected, they will know qualitatively about the problem and the solutions which can help avoid a mistake based on partial, inaccurate or misunderstood data.

You can rest assured I will continue to highlight problems, working to our shared goal of more accurate numbers used intelligently and fairly to underpin policy.

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## Time to govern

The Conservatives as the largest party will have enough seats to govern. After two major constitutional referendums and two General elections in recent years it is time for Parliament and government to make decisions and to see through the decisions UK voters have made.

As expected here, Scottish voters signalled their impatience with the idea of re running the referendum on independence. UK voters rejected the Lib Dem idea of a second Brexit referendum, voting by a huge margin for Con/Lab who both argued to accept Brexit and to leave the single market.

Given the election of 7 Sinn Fein MPs and the Speaker and Deputy Speakers, you only need 320 MPs to form the government as a single party and govern. The DUP is likely to support much of the time anyway.