

# The choice in this election

The polls and the debate show the election has come down to a simple choice. Do you want a Conservative government, or a coalition led by Jeremy Corbyn seeking to implement much of the Labour Manifesto with help from the Greens, Liberal Democrats, SNP, Welsh Nationalists and other parties who share some of Labour's policy agenda? Polls may be wrong, and people may change their minds in the last couple of days, but any other outcome in terms of likely government looks remote.

Both front running parties accept the verdict of the people in the referendum and will get on with implementing Brexit. Both accept we cannot belong to the single market and customs union given the stance of the rest of the EU and the need for the UK to open up many positive new trade relationships with countries outside the EU. Both parties want the best possible access to the EU market and accept we need to offer similar privileged access to our market to secure it. Both parties want to reassure all EU citizens living in the UK and all UK citizens living in the EU that they are free to stay. Both accept that there are various collaborations, joint policies and working arrangements that we wish to continue with the EU.

The difference between the two is over how to secure these shared objectives. The Conservatives will not offer a legally binding guarantee to all EU citizens here until we have the same for our citizens in the EU. Labour favours the unilateral approach. The Conservatives say a bad deal is worse than no deal, and are prepared to walk away if only a bad deal is on offer. Labour is insistent on wanting a deal and has not been prepared to say it would walk away. The question is therefore a simple one. Which is the negotiating strategy more likely to succeed in securing a good deal for both the UK and the EU? Anyone with any experience of negotiating is likely to agree that the Conservative strategy gives the UK a strong hand. The Labour position gives us a weak hand. Why wouldn't the rest of the EU decline to offer a sensible deal, expecting the UK under Mr Corbyn to pay almost any price to secure our very limited negotiating objectives about access to the market and security of people. These are things that they need to offer to secure the same for themselves, but they would of course try to extract a higher price from a weak negotiator.

Both major parties say they wish to keep the UK secure. Mr Corbyn has been required for the time being to accept the purchase of replacement submarines to keep the nuclear deterrent at sea as the Conservative government is doing. He however has undermined the whole point of the deterrent by refusing to state that he would ever use it in extreme circumstances. If dangerous enemies in the future think the deterrent would never be used we have no deterrent and we are wasting a lot of money on the weapons and subs. Mr Corbyn has a history of voting against measures designed to deal with terrorist attacks on the UK. The Prime Minister has made clear her wish to strengthen the UK's defences against extremists who commit mass murder on our streets.

Mr Corbyn has a hugely expensive programme which he wishes to pay for by taxing companies and the rich more, and by borrowing a bit more. It is unlikely he would be able to collect the extra revenue he seeks from companies. The present government has been able to collect a lot more from companies by lowering the rate and making the UK a more attractive place for business to invest and employ people. A big rise in the tax rate might have the opposite effect. In the 1970s when Labour last tried high taxes on the rich and companies we had a brain drain and severe economic problems. Later Labour governments kept individual tax rates down below today's level, whilst they faced less aggressive corporate tax competition than today from other countries.

So my conclusion is simple. If like me you want a Conservative government then you have to vote for one. A vote for any other party is a vote for a coalition led by Mr Corbyn. Such a coalition would do economic damage and be a weak negotiator with the EU.

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## [Wokingham Borough planning and local roads](#)

I welcome the appointment of Councillor David Lee to the important role of setting out plans for future development in Wokingham Borough and for the highways and other transport links this will require. Many people are concerned about the current pace of growth, and wish to see sufficient investment in schools, health facilities, transport links and green spaces as the new housing takes shape.

I accept that Wokingham is an attractive place to many, with plenty of demand for new homes when they are built. We will need to make further space available for development over the years ahead. I am also very conscious that if we allow too much, or do not put in place the right facilities and preserve enough green space we could damage the environment we currently enjoy and the community we value. I look forward to working with David if elected as your MP to persuade government of a sustainable and sensible pace of growth for the next planning period, which must take into account the substantial development already underway under present agreed plans.

I hope the Council will have a green strategy that recognises and protects green gaps between settlements, prime farmland, woods and other important green areas. When planning new housing there needs to be a substantial investment in additional facilities, put in in good time for the new development. This will include needing to manage water run off to avoid flooding, providing capacity for cars to avoid more congestion, and

recruiting and retaining the additional teachers and health staff we will need for the new facilities. There also needs to be some catch up, as we are currently short of some capacity.

The local road network requires improvements on the two main local A roads , the A 329 and the A 327. The Council has begun work on a series of bypasses for Shinfield, Arborfield and Winnersh and will need to do more to improve capacity on these routes. It needs the completion of the northern and southern relief roads in Wokingham with a good bridge link across the railway line, the main cause of current town congestion thanks to reliance on a level crossing. The A 329M is also a local road and will need additional capacity, ideally with an extension to include a new Thames bridge. Congestion into Reading and Henley is great owing to reliance on the single carriageway Sonning bridge and the narrow two carriageway Henley Bridge with traffic lights at one end. So far Oxfordshire has been unwilling to allow a new Thames crossing and this may not be any more easy to change than it has proved in the past.

Reducing road congestion requires generous parking allocations at home and work so parked cars are not occupying highway, and needs better public transport alternatives for regular journeys. It needs improved handling of parents cars dropping off and picking up at schools. It also requires work to improve flows at main junctions, which can also improve their safety. Roundabouts are often better than traffic light sets. Segregating right turning traffic from traffic going straight on can usually improve flows and safety.

The Council is considering whether Grazeley would be the best place for additional housing. If they do decide to favour this approach it will be the subject of a major consultation to assess the public reaction and to take on board suggestions for a good scheme. It will also be important to get some assurances from government that if Wokingham promotes a substantial development there it will not be required to undertake much building elsewhere as well. Such a settlement would need a major investment in transport links for rail and road, east-west, as well as north-south.

Yours thoughts would be welcome, as the Council comes to a view on these important matters. I want the best settlement for Wokingham we can achieve, which needs more work before the Council can conclude on what will be the best way to handle new growth and where to direct it.

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# The defence of democracy

I wish to live in a tolerant society, where we settle our differences through argument, debate and votes. I do not wish to make windows into men's souls. All should be free to practice their own religion, adopt their own belief system, or to exempt themselves from religious activity. All that we ask is that people who live in our society accept our basic belief in freedom and respect the freedoms of others.

We also all have to accept the democratic constraints on our freedom placed by lawmakers we have elected and laws we consent to. Where we do not like the laws we obey them for the time being and campaign for their repeal or amendment. We outlaw violence of one against another. We make illegal any attempt by force to impede another's freedom of belief and speech. We set rules we must all obey to ban speech which can turn people to violence and hatred.

The recent mass murders in Manchester and London have made some people angry as well as worried. All of us who want to uphold our democracy are united in condemning the actions of the murderers and their assistants and tutors if they had any. Hate speech against those who had nothing to do with the atrocities and share our loathing of the murders makes things worse.

I am being urged by some to ask the government to take stronger action. There is no doubt that the government will continue to improve and strengthen its response to extremist violence. The Prime Minister spoke for the many yesterday when she said we must confront the extremist ideology that fuels these crimes and must strengthen our response. We may need more people in Intelligence, monitoring individuals who arouse suspicions, and following up leads and information passed to the authorities by others. It may be that better use could be made of information collected at our borders, as we should be alarmed by individuals who go to places abroad with terrorist training camps, if we have reason to worry about the individuals intentions anyway. We need to ask how an asylum seeker from a dangerous country to whom we have granted asylum feels free to journey back to that very country that he said would damage him. Has he abused our hospitality and kindness if he goes back there? There does need to be better controls over the dissemination of terrorist techniques and incitements to murder.

There are no simple or cheap solutions to rooting out terrorists from our midst. Some were born here. Some have come here more recently, but were not known as potential terrorists when they arrived. If they are known then of course they should be banned from entry. We wish to live in an open and free society, where we welcome in tourists, friends and family for visits without too much hassle. We want our universities to offer courses to foreign students, our companies to have extensive business links with overseas markets and company personnel. I do not wish to live in an armed camp, closed to the world, because of the risks of terrorism. Our best ally for safety lies in ourselves, reporting and assisting the authorities where there are grounds for suspicion. The Intelligence services have a big task to perform, and will I am sure be strengthened further. We need to ask all men and women

of good will, especially those in education and in contact with those who are exploring these evil beliefs to be ever vigilant and concerned for the safety of the wider community.

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## [The brutal attack in London](#)

I have awoken to the news of the dreadful attack in London. I will observe the Conservative decision to suspend campaigning.

I send my condolences to those who have lost relatives and friends, and wish all who are injured a speedy recovery.

The earlier post this morning was written yesterday and posted on a time trigger.

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## [The Conservative secret tax plan](#)

There is a well buried secret in the Conservative Manifesto. It says the government will raise the Income Tax threshold to £12,500 by 2020, and will increase the threshold before you pay 40% higher rate tax to £50,000 by 2020.

I don't understand why we do not hear more about this. The Manifesto explains why it wants to bring tax down. It sets out a vision of a "Strong economy built on sound public finances, low taxes, better regulation and free trade deals with markets around the world". This vision is exactly the one most of you write in to demand, apart from the few who write in every day to condemn whatever I have said.

As we saw yesterday, setting a lower tax rate can bring in more revenue. It certainly has with Corporation Tax. Cutting the top rate of Income Tax from 50% to 45% increased the money taken from the better off. Mr Brown when Labour's Chancellor always thought you got most from the rich at 40% and who is to say he was wrong.

The government would be well advised to review the more discretionary taxes with a view to setting rates that bring in more revenue. Taxes on capital are

regularly avoided by most people because they are transaction related. Many people refuse to sell their shares or their property because to do so would incur a tax charge.

We have seen how many fewer transactions there are in the property market after Mr Osborne's big increase in Stamp duties. It is true revenue from SDLT edged up £0.7bn in the first year after the hikes, but it is also true that transaction volume plunged. A lower rate would be very likely to bring in more revenue, and would do less damage. Currently many people are stuck in property too big or too small for their up to date requirements, but do not wish to incur the high charge of moving.

Capital Gains Tax revenue is stuck around £9bn, a small sum given the large accumulated wealth of the country as a whole in shares and property. Asset markets have gone up a lot in recent years so there are plenty of gains to be taken. The truth is many portfolio investors tell their managers not to take gains above the tax free allowance. Many people who own a second home will not sell it when they cease to use it much, as they have no wish to share 28% of their gains with the Treasury. They hold on thinking the family might want it, visiting it when it is no longer what they really want to do. It would be better if they did sell and the home was used by someone who needs it.

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