



Written by [Steve Byas](#) on April 18, 2017

Brexit's Popularity Leads to Snap British Election

An old English proverb goes, "There will always be an England, and England will always be free, if England means as much to you as England means to me." Apparently, this desire for a "free" England remains strong enough that support for Brexit — the British leaving the increasingly authoritarian European Union (EU) — has become a political plus in the United Kingdom.



"We need a general election and we need one now," British Prime Minister Theresa May (shown on left) said in a surprise announcement Tuesday from the steps of 10 Downing Street. She was asking the House of Commons to set an election date for June 8. As recently as last month, May had vehemently insisted that she would not ask for a general election until it became necessary in 2020. But arguing that her narrow 17-seat majority in the House of Commons is causing Brexit opponents to keep her from negotiating a clean break from the EU, May has taken advantage of a large Tory lead in the polls to call for an earlier election.

One survey published in the British newspaper *The Independent* reports that May's Conservative Party was enjoying a 21-point lead over the second-place Labour Party. This is the largest lead the Conservatives have enjoyed since just before Margaret Thatcher won reelection by a large margin in 1983. Ironically, the "Iron Lady" was basically ousted from her post as prime minister by her own Conservative Party because she opposed Britain's membership in the EU.

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Now, opposition to U.K. membership in the EU has become such a political plus that May is making carrying out Brexit a leading issue in her bid to continue as the prime minister.

May argued that opposition parties are using the narrow Tory lead in the Commons to frustrate the will of the British voters to leave the EU. While May was initially not for Brexit, she appears, on the surface at least, to have fully embraced the decision. "I trust the British people," she said. A skeptic might think, however, that she may merely be confident that globalist media and her opponents will be able to scuttle any chance of Brexit going through via an election win.

However, she seems particularly buoyed by polls indicating that she leads Labour Party chief Jeremy Corbyn by over 30 points, when voters are asked who would make the better prime minister.



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May had particularly strong words for the Scottish First Minister Nicola Sturgeon (shown on right), charging that Sturgeon, the leader of the Scottish National Party (SNP) was using the national decision to leave the EU as an opportunity to tear apart the United Kingdom. While Brexit passed in most of the U.K., the referendum failed last year in Scotland. Brexit has led to a resurgence in talk inside Scotland about leaving the U.K. (Scotland voted two years ago to remain inside the U.K.).

In the current House of Commons, May's Conservative Party holds 330 seats out of 650 total. Labour has 229, followed by the SNP at 54. The Liberal Democrats have a mere eight seats, with some other parties and independents holding the remaining 29 slots.

Despite some members of her own Conservative Party having initially opposed Brexit (including former Prime Minister David Cameron and May herself), May appears to have strong support from within her Tory membership to carry out the will of the British people. "The country is coming together," May said, but she noted, "Labour have threatened to vote against the final agreement we reach. The Lib Dems have said they want to grind the business of government to a standstill. Unelected members of the House of Lords have vowed to fight us every step of the way."

Because of this, May explained, she has reversed her earlier view that the next general election should be put off until 2020.

The Fixed-term Parliaments Act does not allow the prime minister to call an election early on her own. But she can bring the issue before the Commons, where it will require a two-thirds vote backing her decision. The queen has already said she will dissolve Parliament after such a vote, clearing the way for a national election on June 8.

Despite his Labour Party trailing the Conservative Party by a large margin in the polls, Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn welcomed the decision for an early election, and suggested that his party would support May's call for the June vote. "I welcome the prime minister's decision to give the British people the chance to vote for a government that will put the interests of the majority first. Labour will be offering the country an effective alternative to a government that has failed to rebuild the economy, delivered falling living standards and damaging cuts to our schools and NHS (the National Health Service)."

Labour, however, will have a tough time running against Brexit on economic grounds. In the immediate aftermath of Brexit, the British stock markets tumbled and there was talk of a national economic tail-spin. That has not been the case, as new economic forecasts from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) are predicting a strong two-percent growth for the U.K. economy this year, with similar expectations for next year. Both of these estimates exceed the original grim predictions made of an imploding British economy after the Brexit vote.

Still, Corbyn believed that his Labour Party will gain seats in the upcoming election. "I think the issue will get out there more and more, people will begin to understand that we don't have to go through these levels of austerity in Britain, we don't have to have these levels of inequality in Britain."

Corbyn's leftist rhetoric is not surprising, considering that the original name of his political party was the Socialist Labour Party. Other parties, however, tended to focus on opposition to Brexit. The Liberal Democrat Party leader Tim Farron, for example, said, "This election is your chance to change the direction of our country. If you want to avoid a disastrous Hard Brexit. *If you want to keep Britain in the Single Market.* If you want to keep a Britain that is open, tolerant and united, this is your chance. Only the Liberal Democrats can prevent a Conservative majority." (Emphasis added.)

Nicola Sturgeon of the Scottish National Party expressed similar views. "The Tories see a chance to



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move UK to the right, force through a hard Brexit and impose deeper cuts. Let's stand up for Scotland." Sturgeon said of May, "She is clearly betting that the Tories can win a bigger majority in England given the utter disarray in the Labour Party. That makes it all the more important that Scotland is protected from a Tory Party which now sees the change of grabbing control of government for many years to come and moving the UK further to the right.... That means this will be — more than ever before — an election about standing up for Scotland, in the face of a right-wing, austerity-based Tory government with no mandate in Scotland."

Green Party co-leader Caroline Lucas voiced similar sentiments when she said, "Only the Green Party offers a bold, positive vision for a different kind of Britain." Such rhetoric is reminiscent of then-candidate Barack Obama in 2008, who promised the "fundamental transformation of America."

The Labour Party's "shadow" Foreign Office minister, Catherine West, said she wants to see Labour hold the Conservative government to account on Brexit in the areas of environmental protection and workers' rights.

These comments sum up the argument that May is making in the campaign leading up to the June 8 election. Should the left-wing parties of Labour, Green, and Liberal Democrat win enough seats, the Conservative Party government will face increased difficulty in making a clean break with the EU. "Our opponents believe that because the government's majority is extremely small that they can weaken our resolve and persuade us to change course."

May continued: "If we do not hold a general election now, their political game playing will continue as negotiations with the European Union will reach their most pivotal stage in the run up to the next general election. Division in Westminster will risk our ability to make a success of Brexit, and will cause damaging uncertainty and instability to the country."

Photo of Theresa May and Nicola Sturgeon: <https://firstminister.gov.scot/fm-meets-new-pm/>



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