



What does the election result mean for Brexit?

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Brexit barely figured in the UK's general election, but the result means that the country might yet have an election fought explicitly on the issue.

The UK's general election was not fought on the issue of Brexit so the result should not be seen as a rejection of withdrawal. However, it will have serious ramifications for the process. It is all but impossible to see the Brexit negotiations starting as planned on June 19th. After all, Britain has no government, no consensus on what kind of Brexit the country wants and no mandate to pursue it. The result also leaves open the possibility that the country will eventually have a general election fought on the issue of Brexit. The EU can help bring this – still slim possibility – about by showing some flexibility over the timing of the negotiations.

Theresa May will not be able to hold onto power and will resign – she has lost all credibility within her party and has proved to be an electoral liability. Once the Tories have elected a new leader, they may try to govern with the support of the Northern Irish Democratic Unionist Party (DUP), and attempt to push ahead with the Brexit negotiations. DUP support would give the Tories a narrow majority in parliament, but such an arrangement would be inherently unstable. First, in their manifesto the DUP called for a softer form of Brexit than the Tories, since Brexit threatens profound economic dislocation in Northern Ireland. Second, even with DUP support, the Tories would be acutely vulnerable to defections and rebellions by both Conservative MPs determined to negotiate as close a deal as possible with the EU and those committed to a clean break with it. In all likelihood, the government would not be able to agree a negotiating position, let alone hold to it.

The second scenario is that the Conservatives and the Labour Party broker a cross-party consensus on how to approach the Brexit negotiations. This would again require the Conservatives to concede a continued role for the European Court of Justice (which Labour has not ruled out), opening the way for a closer relationship with the EU. The Conservatives would also have to soften their hostility to immigration