2017 UK General Election

18 May 2017

#PSAMedia
Speakers

I - Voters and the 2017 Election 1 - 4
Dr Chris Prosser (University of Manchester)
chris.prosser@manchester.ac.uk - 07749 643486 – @caprosser
www.britishelectionstudy.com/

II - Women Candidates and Public Perceptions 5 – 8
Dr Jennifer Hudson (University College London)
jennifer.hudson@ucl.ac.uk - 07899 740249 - @jhudson_ucl

III - The 2017 UK General Election in Scotland 9 - 15
Professor Ailsa Henderson (University of Edinburgh)
ailsa.henderson@ed.ac.uk - 07929 587 060 - @ailsa_henderson

IV - Post-election prospects for Britain’s parties and its party system in the wake of #GE2017 17 - 20
Professor Tim Bale (Queen Mary University of London)
t.bale@qmul.ac.uk - 07988 351524 - @ProfTimBale

Chair: Claire Ainsley (Trustee, Political Studies Association; Director of Communications and External Affairs, Joseph Rowntree Foundation)
I - Voters and the 2017 Election

Dr Chris Prosser (University of Manchester)

These findings are drawn from British Election Study (britishelectionstudy.com) data – primarily the most recent wave of our internet panel survey, which interviews around 30,000 people per wave. The most recent wave was conducted in late November and early December 2016. It also draws on earlier British Election Study data from 2010, 2015 and a series of panel surveys (which interview the same people at multiple time points) that date back to 1964.

A volatile electorate - putting the 2017 election into context

With the Conservatives riding high in the polls, the collapse in support for UKIP, and the Liberal Democrats struggling to regain lost support, some commentators have suggested that the 2017 election might mark a return to the two-party politics of old. Whilst this might be superficially true in the short term, the sociological structure that underpinned the old two-party system has long eroded and 2017 is unlikely to mark a return to the stable two-party politics of old. As the figure below – which uses British Election Study panel survey data that interviews the same people between pairs of elections from 1964 to 2015 – shows, British voters have become increasingly likely to switch parties between elections. In the 1960s and early 1970s only around 15% of voters switched parties from one election to another. In 2015, 43% of voters chose a different party from the one they voted for in 2010.

Percentage of people at each election voting for a different party compared to the previous election.

Voters are unlikely to suddenly return to 1960s levels of loyalty overnight. The Conservatives may look likely to dominate the 2017 election but the basis for a return to long term dominance is on a much shakier footing.

Although the polls and likely outcome of the election would suggest dramatic changes in how voters feel about the parties, our data suggests that under the surface, these changes are much more muted. The figures below show the average rating British Election Study respondents gave each party and party leader when asked how much they liked each party and leader on a 0-10 scale before the 2010 and 2015 elections, and in December 2016.
Feelings towards political parties (top) and party leaders (bottom) 2010, 2015, and 2016. The SNP and Plaid Cymru are only asked to respondents in Scotland and Wales respectively. Source: British Election Study Internet Panel Surveys.

Despite their polling positions, the Conservatives are about only as well-liked as they were in 2010 (though slightly more than they were in 2015) and Labour is only slightly less well liked than they were in 2015 and are more well liked than they were in 2010. Compared to the dramatic changes in feelings towards the Liberal Democrats after 2010 and the SNP after the Scottish Independence referendum, these changes are relatively small.

There is much more change in how voters feel about party leaders. Theresa May is much more well liked than David Cameron – her popularity rivals Nick Clegg’s at the height of ‘Cleggmania’ and is in line with Nicola Sturgeon’s popularity in Scotland. Jeremy Corbyn is disliked more than Gordon Brown and Ed Miliband – but only slightly.
Together these figures paint a picture of an election where the dominance of the Conservatives in the polls is driven by the relative popularity of party leaders – and not by large changes in the underlying way people feel about the major parties. Feelings about leaders are much less stable than feelings about political parties. Should Theresa May become unpopular if Brexit goes badly or if the Labour party chooses a popular leader to replace Jeremy Corbyn, the fortunes of each party could look very different at the next election after 2017.

**Is this the Brexit election?**

One of the first questions we ask respondents in our surveys is what they think is the most important issue facing the country. An easy way to visualise this data is to draw a word cloud, which adjusts the size of a word in the cloud by the frequency it appears in people’s responses. The cloud below shows people’s responses to this question in December 2016. ‘Brexit’ dominates the cloud with 43% of respondents mentioning Brexit in their answers.

> Word cloud of responses to ‘As far as you’re concerned, what is the single most important issue facing the country at the present time?’ Source: British Election Study Internet Panel Wave 10.

Clearly Brexit is high in the minds of voters, but the way in which it is affecting vote choice is not entirely straightforward. The figure below shows the flow of the vote from 2015 to vote intentions in December 2016 by Remain and Leave vote in the EU Referendum. There has been a great deal of movement in vote intentions since 2015 amongst both Remainers and Leavers. In December 2016 only 56% of Remainers and 56% of Leavers said they would vote for the same party as they voted for in 2015. However there is not yet a clear re-alignment of party choice along remain/leave lines, although the Remain side is much more fragmented than the Leave side, where the Conservatives have the largest chunk of the vote. There are also a large number of undecided voters – the “don’t knows” constitute the third largest “party” for both Remain and Leave voters. How these undecided voters end up voting will determine the scale of any ‘Brexit re-alignment’.

*Flow of the vote between the 2015 election and vote intention in December 2016 by Remain and Leave vote. Source: British Election Study Internet Panel Wave 10.*
Leadership and competence

If Brexit isn’t the key predictor of vote choice in 2017 – what is? The obvious answer is how voters feel about the Conservative and Labour leaders, and whether they think Jeremy Corbyn would make a better Prime Minister than Theresa May. The graph below shows that Theresa May is better liked than Corbyn and is seen as having more integrity, and – most importantly – as being much more competent.

*Feelings towards Jeremy Corbyn and Theresa May and perceptions of their integrity and competence.*

Source: British Election Study Internet Panel Wave 10.

The feeling that Jeremy Corbyn would not make a very good Prime Minister is strikingly illustrated in the graph below, which shows how likely respondents were to say whether Corbyn or May would make the best Prime Minister according to how much they liked that leader. Even amongst those that quite like him, a much smaller proportion think he would make the best Prime Minster compared to those that like May to the same extent – for those in the middle of the scale (who like Corbyn more than the average voter) only 8% think he would make the best PM and even amongst those who give Corbyn a seven (which means liking Corbyn twice as much as the average voter) only 41% think he would be the best PM. This compares very poorly to May – 41% of those who put May in the middle of the scale and 85% of those who rate her a seven think she would be the best PM. Even those who quite like Corbyn seem to be lukewarm about the prospect of him becoming Prime Minister.

*Percentage thinking Corbyn/May would make the best Prime Minister by how much respondents liked that leader.* Source: British Election Study Internet Panel Wave 10.
II - Women Candidates and Public Perceptions

Dr Jennifer Hudson (UCL), Professor Rosie Campbell (Birkbeck University) & Dr Chris Hanretty (University of East Anglia)

Women: More candidates, more MPs?

- Centralised selection processes provided opportunity for party leadership to push equality agenda
- Concerted efforts in selecting women candidates
  - Labour and LibDems via all-women shortlists
  - Conservatives via Women2Win, ‘inspiration’ of Theresa May, and shift in attitudes

Table 1. Women candidates: 2015 -2017

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Party</th>
<th>2015 (Women)</th>
<th>%Women</th>
<th>2017 (Women)</th>
<th>%Women</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Conservative</td>
<td>648 (169)</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>638 (183)</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Labour</td>
<td>631 (214)</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>631 (256)</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lib Dem</td>
<td>631 (166)</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>630 (185)</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UKIP</td>
<td>625 (78)</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>377 (55)</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Green</td>
<td>573 (216)</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>467 (161)</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SNP</td>
<td>59 (21)</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>59 (20)</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2. 2017 forecast (women) MPs by party

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Party</th>
<th>Forecast All MPs</th>
<th>Forecast Women MPs</th>
<th>Women MPs as % of forecast</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Conservative</td>
<td>410</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Labour</td>
<td>158</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>46%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lib Dem</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other parties</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3. Difference between 2015 and 2017 in number of (women) MPs

2017 will not be a step-change in representation in the Commons:
- a small increase from 2015 in women MPs – 191 to 194 – but down on the number at the time of dissolution (196)

Conservatives now lead on women – party with most women MPs.
- Labour’s PLP nearly 50:50 in terms of gender balance

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Party</th>
<th>All MPs (N)</th>
<th>Women MPs (N)</th>
<th>Women MPs (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Conservative</td>
<td>330 410</td>
<td>68 98</td>
<td>21 24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Labour</td>
<td>232 158</td>
<td>99 73</td>
<td>43 46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lib Dem</td>
<td>8 8</td>
<td>0 1</td>
<td>0 11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other parties</td>
<td>80 74</td>
<td>24 22</td>
<td>13 30</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Feelings of the British electorate on the general election

The campaign: Strong and stable, but dull?

“Which, if any, of the following words describe your feelings about the upcoming general election on 8 June?”

Dull – Even for Leave voters

“Which, if any, of the following words describe your feelings about the upcoming general election on 8 June?”
Feelings of the British electorate on Jeremy Corbyn

Supporters like their party leader, even if few others do...

"Which, if any, of the following words describe your feelings about Jeremy Corbyn?"

Feelings of the British electorate on Theresa May

Marmite May: supporters are more hopeful and confident than Corbyn’s – but non-supporters are more likely to say they feel angry and afraid.

"Which, if any, of the following words describe your feelings about Theresa May?"
Appendix

Election Forecast – electionforecast.co.uk
○ Dr Chris Hanretty - c.hanretty@uea.ac.uk | @chrishanretty

PCUK – parliamentarycandidates.org
○ Dr Jennifer Hudson | jennifer.hudson@ucl.ac.uk | @jhudson_ucl
○ Professor Rosie Campbell | r.campbell@bbk.ac.uk | @ProfRosieCamp

Project Methodology
We ran 1,000 simulated elections, and counted the number of female candidates elected in each simulated election. In three-quarters of simulated elections, the number of female MPs was lower than the current number of female MPs, at 196. The most likely outcome was a parliament with 194 women.

Campaign emotions: question wording
○ #election: Which, if any, of the following words describe your feelings about the upcoming general election on June 8th?
○ #may: Which, if any, of the following words describe you feelings about Theresa May?
○ #corbyn: Which, if any, of the following words describe your feelings about Jeremy Corbyn?
○ Data: YouGov, fielded May 2017, n= 1,630
   ● Conservative (weighted)=588
   ● Labour=396
   ● LibDem=115
   ● UKIP=39
   ● SNP/PCY= 63
   ● Undecided= 297
III - The 2017 UK General Election in Scotland
Professor Ailsa Henderson (University of Edinburgh)

1. How has Scottish context changed?

1.1 End of split partisanship
   - Converging on Holyrood preferences

Consistent partisan identification across democratic contests (2005-07, 2010-11, 2015-16)

Voter consistency across Westminster and Holyrood elections, 2015-16

1.2 'Inconsistent' cross-level voting resolved by voting with referendum preference, not previous partisan preference
   - And true for some more than others
Consistency across constitutional preferences and partisan preferences:

Resolving inconsistency in 2016:

1.3 Parties campaigning on issues related to other electoral issues
- Eg Local election campaign run on decidedly non-local issues
2. **To what extent is UKGE17 different in Scotland?**
   - UK-wide campaign
     - Benefits of ‘strong and stable’ Conservative majority for Brexit negotiations
     - Labour: soft Brexit, fairer Britain
     - Polls: Strong support for Conservative party
   - Campaign in Scotland
     - Brexit significantly fewer mentions from parties
     - Unionist parties (esp Conservatives) emphasizing No to indyref2
     - A lot of campaign literature emphasising strategic voting (w dodgy graphs)
     - Polls: Increased support from Conservative party (+13, from low base) SNP clear lead but -9, Labour in freefall

3. **Where are parties targeting? Labour?**
   - Hold Edinburgh South with margin of 2637
   - Claim they’re targeting 7 where they were ahead of or within 1 % of SNP
     - East Lothian
     - Coatbridge, Chryston and Bellshill
     - Lanark and Hamilton E
     - Midlothian
     - Airdrie and Shotts
     - Glasgow SW
     - Kirkcaldy and Cowdenbeath

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Labour targets (RED = possible good news)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>SNP % 15</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>42.5 to 31.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% lead over Lab 15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National swing whittles lead to (SNP-9, Lab-6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>EST No vote 14</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>EST Leave vote 16</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2016 Lab over SNP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Lab fp 17</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Con fp 17</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>SNP fp 17</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3. **Where are parties targeting? Conservatives?**
   - Hold Dumfriesshire, Clydesdale and Tweeddale with majority of 798
   - Targets
     - Berwickshire, Roxburgh and Selkirk
     - Dumfries and Galloway
     - West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine
     - Perth and North Perthshire
     - Aberdeen South
     - East Renfrewshire
     - Moray
3. Where are parties targeting? LibDems and other seats?
   • Liberal Democrats
     • Hold Orkney and Shetland, majority of 814ish
     • Targets
       • Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross
       • East Dunbartonshire
   • Other possible targets:
     • 2 SNP MPs no longer with party
       • Glasgow East – Labour possible target?
       • Edinburgh West possible LibDem target as did well in SP here
     • Edinburgh N and Leith for Labour? Malcolm Chisholm’s old seat, very high No vote

4. What should we make of seat predictions?
   • Predictions thus far ....

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Party</th>
<th>Electoral Calculus</th>
<th>Election Forecast</th>
<th>Iain Dale</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SNP</td>
<td>46 (42.7)</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cons</td>
<td>11 (29.7)</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LibDem</td>
<td>2 (7)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Labour</td>
<td>0 (16.3)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

• Caution. Why?
  • Inferring UKGE preferences from STV votes
  • Better for Scotland than in England (Scotland-wide elections) but
    • Preferences traditionally different
      • Markedly different (first) preferences from 2016
      • Which COULD mean UKGEprefs will mirror previous election’s preferences
• Or could mean politics as normal, prefs different across electoral levels

• Polls
  • Often based on very small samples for Scotland
  • Scotland not independently weighted
  • Margins of error therefore larger
  • If base on larger ns, results are often different

4a. How well do local results predict UKGE results in Scotland?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SNP</td>
<td>27.9</td>
<td>19.9</td>
<td>45.4</td>
<td>32.3</td>
<td>50.0</td>
<td>46.5</td>
<td>32.3</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cons</td>
<td>15.6</td>
<td>16.7</td>
<td>13.9</td>
<td>13.3</td>
<td>14.9</td>
<td>22.6</td>
<td>25.3</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Labour</td>
<td>28.1</td>
<td>42.0</td>
<td>31.7</td>
<td>31.4</td>
<td>24.3</td>
<td>22.0</td>
<td>20.0</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LibDems</td>
<td>12.7</td>
<td>18.9</td>
<td>7.9</td>
<td>6.6</td>
<td>7.5</td>
<td>7.8</td>
<td>6.8</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greens</td>
<td>0.7</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>0.6</td>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indep</td>
<td>10.9</td>
<td></td>
<td>11.78</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>10.5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Turnout</td>
<td>52.8</td>
<td>63.8</td>
<td>50.4</td>
<td>39.6</td>
<td>71.1</td>
<td>55.6</td>
<td>46.9</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4b. How well do polls predict UKGE results in Scotland?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>March poll</th>
<th>2010 UK GE in S</th>
<th>March poll</th>
<th>Latest poll</th>
<th>2015 UK GE in S</th>
<th>Latest polls*</th>
<th>2017 UK GE in S</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SNP</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cons</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Labour</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LibDem</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5. Labour: How bad is it? How do 2015 voters say they’ll cast their ballot in 2017?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>SNP voter</th>
<th>Lab voter</th>
<th>Con voter</th>
<th>LibDem voter</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SNP intention</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lab intention</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Con intention</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LibDem intention</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

YouGov 24-27 April, n=1017
5. Labour: How bad is it? How did 2010 voters say they’d cast their ballot? (vs 2015)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SNP voter</th>
<th>Lab voter</th>
<th>Con voter</th>
<th>LibDem voter</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SNP intention</td>
<td>86 (79)</td>
<td>44 (7)</td>
<td>13 (3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lab intention</td>
<td>6 (5)</td>
<td>49 (53)</td>
<td>18 (3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Con intention</td>
<td>4 (10)</td>
<td>4 (31)</td>
<td>57 (87)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LibDem intention</td>
<td>1 (2)</td>
<td>3 (8)</td>
<td>9 (5)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

YouGov 4-6 May 2015, n=1351

6. What impact might UKGE have on indyref2 timing and preferences?
   • Depends in part on what is in SNP manifesto re how interpret support (# seats, %, reference to 2016 win)
   • Attitudes to timing
   • Preferences

Should there be a referendum?
   • Support for another referendum varies by question wording
     • If ask yes/no, get higher % for No
     • If include various timing options, support for holding one increases
       • Panelbase March has 50-50 split (1/3 while negotiating, just under 20% after negotiations)
   • In general, support for referendum is tepid at best, linked to perceived priorities of government
     • YouGov: Should the Scottish Government campaign for independence over the next 2 years? No 56%, rising to 64% when exclude don’t knows
     • But also sense that the UK government should agree to one if the First Minister calls for one
       • Yes 52%, rising to 78% among younger voters

Aggregate stability masks individual volatility
   • SES 2016
   • If Leave wins
     • No switch to Yes 6.5
     • Yes switch to No 5.3
     • Yes both 85.4
   • If Remain wins
     • No switch to Yes 3.6
     • Yes switch to No 8.5
     • Yes both 81.7
   • Not more volatility if Leave wins (but volatility in – slight - direction of Yes)
Who are the switchers? (SES2016)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Yes stable</th>
<th>Yes to No</th>
<th>No stable</th>
<th>No to Yes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AB</td>
<td>27.5</td>
<td>27.5</td>
<td>35.6</td>
<td>23.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women</td>
<td>48.9</td>
<td>47.3</td>
<td>51.8</td>
<td>57.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University</td>
<td>30.5</td>
<td>18.7</td>
<td>28.4</td>
<td>33.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age (ave)</td>
<td>47.3</td>
<td>50.9</td>
<td>52.4</td>
<td>42.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- At present, issue is amount of movement but also the TYPE of person switching
- Evidence that picking up the very constituencies in which were weak (women, university educated) and shoring up support among demographic groups in which were already strong (younger voters, CDE)
IV - Post-election prospects for Britain’s parties and its party system in the wake of #GE2017

Professor Tim Bale (Queen Mary University of London)

Speaking in an interview earlier this week, Vince Cable suggested that ‘politics after the election may be more interesting than before it.’ Given the dogged determination of at least one of the major parties to ensure things remain as dull as possible in the run up to June 8th, and given how big the gap in support between that party and its nearest rival seems to be, he may well be right. If there's no real fun to be had, then, from discussing the campaign or the likely result, perhaps it's worth, instead, peering a little further into the future and wondering what might happen once it's over.

Parties do not, of course, exist in a vacuum: every move each one makes has repercussions for at least some, if not all, of the others in the system they combine to create. What follows, then, is an attempt to think through the implications of a landslide Conservative victory (at least in England) for the individual parties in a way that also takes account of their impacts on each other.

The Conservatives

It’s almost amusing to recall that, last year, people were debating whether the Tories might split over Brexit, although admittedly more of them were worried about the consequences for the party were the UK to vote to remain rather than to leave the EU. Fortunately, at least for the unity of the Conservatives, the country’s decision to quit Europe, plus the replacement of David Cameron by Theresa May (a ‘reluctant Remainer’ now bent on a ‘hard Brexit’) and the virtual disappearance of anyone on the Tory benches who could properly be labelled a ‘Europhile’, means there will be no repeat of the schisms over free trade and protection that periodically plagued the party between the 1840s and the 1930s.

That does not mean, of course, that there might not be trouble ahead. A large majority can be a mixed blessing, as Harold Wilson, who had just been re-elected Labour Prime Minister in 1966 with a hugely increased majority, observed when asked, as he was practicing his putting at Chequers just after the election, ‘How’s your handicap?’: ‘Gone up’, Wilson replied, quick as a flash, ‘from three to ninety-seven’.

True, when things are tight, a Prime Minister is always potentially at the mercy of the ‘headbangers’ on his or her backbenches – presumably one of the reasons Mrs May chose to call the election before rather than after a negotiation that, unless it is to end in no deal, is bound to involve compromises with ‘Brussels’ to which her Euro sceptic ultras would object. On the other hand, knowing that the government will probably ‘get its business’ even if they rebel does afford malcontents on the Tory backbenches the luxury of voting with their consciences when they choose to. And although that is extremely unlikely to endanger Mrs May’s majority, and therefore her ability to pass legislation, it could create a potentially damaging impression of division – and not necessarily a misleading one because there is (indeed always has been and probably always will be) a tension (sometimes creative, sometimes less so) between the Conservative Party’s nationalism and its support for free markets and faster growth.

UKIP

Whatever else one thinks of Mrs May, she has been extraordinarily successful in winning over the support of many of the nearly four million people who voted for UKIP last time round. Brexit, border control, grammar schools, strong, common-sense leadership, support for ordinary working people and the merest dash of criticism of big business – you name it, the Prime Minister has supplied it and the response, especially now Nigel seems finally to have left the building, has been everything she could have hoped for and more. If Paul Nuttall, seen by his critics (both within and without the party) as a hapless, hopeless character, cannot improve on the party’s dire local election performance and its current opinion poll ratings, his position must surely be under threat post-election. Or at least it would be if there were anyone seriously willing and able (and, indeed, brave enough!) to take over.
As a result, it is probably no exaggeration to suggest that UKIP is facing a bleak future – presuming it has a future at all. The party is apparently haemorrhaging members as fast as it is haemorrhaging voters, and is widely thought to have severe financial problems now its biggest donors have shut their wallets. That, and the fact that there will be no more EU money coming the party’s way after 2019, may mean it will very soon no longer be a going concern, either electorally or organisationally – or both.

Given, however, that Mrs May will almost certainly be unable to reduce immigration into the country substantially, at least in the short term, and given that the cultural anxiety created by Britain becoming an ever more multicultural society is unlikely to go away, the country may still have room for an Islamophobic, English-nationalist party. But unless it is led by someone skilled and charismatic enough to convince people that it is not the BNP Mark II, then it will – like the BNP Mark I – be condemned to roam the radical right-wing fringes of the party system, where there are few votes and no seats.

**The SNP**

Scottish nationalism, being *civic* rather than *ethnic*, is, on the other hand, entirely respectable and likely to remain popular for the foreseeable future. The SNP appears to have replaced Labour as the default, centre-left hegemon north of the border and, although, it may cede seats to the Conservatives (and possibly one or two other parties) at this election, looks set fair to govern Scotland for a few years yet.

Sure, it will not be able completely to escape mounting criticism of the way Scottish public services, and in particular health and education, are performing, not least because support for the SNP is rather more practical (as opposed to ideological) than many (in England anyway) realise. But Nicola Sturgeon will undoubtedly be able to deflect at least some of it onto the Conservatives ‘down there in London’, especially when May’s massive majority will inevitably call to mind the 1980s – the decade to which future historians (notwithstanding the fact that the party made its first breakthrough in the 1960s) will probably trace the origins of what may be the eventual break-up of the Union.

Certainly, Ms Sturgeon and her colleagues could not have asked for a better outcome from this election in terms of convincing their electorate that there is no future for Scotland in Great Britain. Unfortunately for them, however, *IndyRef2* will also be bound up with Brexit: yes, the majority of Scots voted for remain, but a substantial minority wanted to leave; convincing them that breaking with Britain need not mean re-joining the EU could be a bridge too far, in which case Ms Sturgeon may not be leading the party into the next UK general election. Whether, in that event, her party will be lucky enough to find its third exceptional leader in a row is surely a moot point.

**The Greens**

Placing the SNP on the left-right spectrum with any precision is not always as easy as some like to think, but that is not the case when it comes to the Greens (more accurately the Green Party of England and Wales, since the Scottish Party is independent). Their 2015 manifesto undoubtedly qualified them as the most left-leaning of all the parties that won significant numbers of votes in the last general election. Whether, however, they can garner as much support this time round will be interesting to see.

On the upside, they are led by a more high-profile and more gifted politician in Caroline Lucas, occupier of the Greens’ only Westminster seat, Brighton Pavilion. On the downside, the lack of a full-blown, televised leaders’ debate this time round will mean less visibility. Meanwhile, many of those who supported the party last time round may – because, as so-called ‘Watermelons’ (green on the outside, red on the inside) they are as much driven by left-liberalism as they are environmental concerns – may vote Labour this time round. The Lib Dems may also have lost at least a little of the toxicity they picked up by going into coalition with the Tories last time round, meaning that some of the so-called ‘Mangoes’ (green on the outside, orange on the inside) may drift back from the Greens towards them.
But while the Greens may lose votes (and are unlikely to gain additional seats) at this election, it will not make much difference to their prospects post-election. They are, after all, used to being a small, marginalised party which – partly because of Caroline Lucas, partly because the environment is a genuinely pressing problem and reluctantly acknowledged as such by most UK voters – can continue to function quite happily as the nation’s conscience. In that sense, the party’s vote-share is largely, if not completely irrelevant. Unless, and until, other parties comprehensively adopt the Green Party’s radical agenda, which is highly unlikely, given what they see as its deleterious consequences for economic growth and electoral popularity, then its niche will always be there – and may, considering the rise in the proportion of the population going into higher education, even expand over time.

The Lib Dems
Four things look like styming a Lib Dem fightback at this election, notwithstanding the fact that they are the only decent-sized party outside Scotland claiming to represent the fabled 48% who voted to remain and notwithstanding the impressive increase in membership that they have seen since then. Firstly, many of that 48% voted for parties other than the Lib Dems in 2015 and are going to stick with those parties in spite of their respective stances on Brexit – good (Tories), bad (Greens and the SNP), or ‘it depends’ (Labour). Secondly, outside of the proverbially leafy suburbs of (south-west) London and a handful of ‘university towns’, the seats they lost in 2015 are in parts of (mainly southern) England where Leave won the day in the EU Referendum. Thirdly, they remain toxic to many ‘progressive’ voters after their fateful (and some would say fatally misguided) decision to go into coalition with the Conservatives in May 2010. And fourthly and finally, their leader, Tim Farron, whatever his intrinsic merits, doesn’t rate with (and often doesn’t even impinge on the consciousness of) the great British public.

The Lib Dems may therefore be holding a leadership contest in the medium if not the short-term, although it is difficult to see any candidate on the horizon who would do markedly better than the incumbent. Vince Cable (and, who knows, his remark on politics getting interesting after the election may have been an oblique reference to it?) may have a crack if returned to parliament. And Norman Lamb, who lost out to Farron last time round, might have another go. Whether either of them can realistically hope to accelerate what only time (and possibly a catastrophically bad Brexit) can heal is less than certain.

Again, though, the Lib Dems, like the Greens, are used to surviving in the wilderness, on top of which they still have a relatively strong base in local government. They do not seem, then, to be facing a threat which could accurately be labelled ‘existential’ unless...

The Labour Party
This election is not about whether Labour is going to lose, it’s about how badly. What matters is what happens next and that depends in part on how many parliamentary seats the party ends up with on June 9th. Clearly, judging from its tax, spend, and nationalise manifesto, and from the study made of Jeremy Corbyn’s campaign itinerary by the BBC’s Chris Cook, the leadership is hoping not so much to win over undecided voters as to mobilize its base sufficient to match Ed Miliband’s 30.4% of the vote in 2015. But while, if their plan works, an equivalent or near-equivalent vote share may allow Corbyn and co. to mount a rhetorical argument in favour of their strategy over the last eighteen months, it will not be enough (owing to the number of Labour-held marginals that will inevitably fall to a resurgent Conservative Party) to stop Labour dropping below two hundred seats. And if their plan doesn’t work, and its vote share heads towards the mid-20s, the party could find itself on its lowest share of seats since the 1930s.

Whatever, Jeremy Corbyn will have to decide whether, like some of his predecessors, to stay on or, as Ed Miliband did in 2015, to accept responsibility for the defeat and resign immediately. If he stays on, it will presumably be not so much because he plans to be in the job for another full parliamentary term but because he hopes his being there will improve the chances of his being replaced sooner or later by another MP from the radical wing of the party – something made more likely, though by no means certain, if the PLP’s left can change Labour’s rules to reduce the number of nominations required to make it onto the ballot paper sent out to Labour’s largely left-liberal membership.
There are, however, two problems with this strategy. First, the left is not as good at grassroots organizing as many assume and there is no guarantee that they will achieve that rule change at Labour’s autumn conference. Second, Corbyn could well face a challenge before then anyway. And if he is challenged over the summer – likely rivals would include Yvette Cooper, Chukka Umunna and possibly Dan Jarvis – then we cannot take it for granted that he would win – not after a damaging election defeat and a possible change of heart on the part of trade union leaders worried about throwing their members’ good money after bad. True, with their help, he beat Owen Smith by a 20% margin in 2016, but it wouldn’t take anything like all of that 20% to peel away, for Corbyn to be defeated.

If Corbyn resigns immediately after the party’s impending election defeat, it will be because left-wing Labour MPs reckon they can muster 15% of their colleagues in the PLP and the party’s delegation to the European Parliament to nominate one of their number for the leadership. Calculations vary, but this is by no means impossible, not least because Corbynite MPs are slightly more likely to escape losing their seats than the non-Corbynite MPs who will nevertheless continue to make up the bulk of the PLP after the general election. Should they achieve their aim, Labour’s fate will be in the hands of its membership.

Again, we should be careful not to assume it will go for another left-winger. Members value their principles and many will doubtless buy into the argument that ‘Jeremy’ was traduced by the media and stabbed in the back by his ‘Blairite’ parliamentary colleagues. But they also want to win power and won’t relish the prospect of what looks like being a further five (and probably ten) years out of office.

That said, if members do vote for another out-and-out left-winger (as opposed to a Neil Kinnock-style ‘soft-left’, compromise candidate), then there is now a serious possibility that the Labour Party will suffer a historic, possibly fatal split. Although they will have just been re-elected as Labour MPs, and although they know the 1980s/SDP precedent and the obstacles posed by the first-past-the-post system only too well, there may be at least 100 Labour MPs (centrists, moderates, call them what you will) who are not prepared to go down with a sinking ship. They also know that, if they register as a new party, they will immediately become the Official Opposition, that there will be people prepared to back the new venture financially, and that there are a lot of centrist voters out there who would at least consider supporting a new outfit. So, too, might tens (possibly hundreds) of thousands of Labour’s grassroots members, as well of many of its staffers. And who knows, if things really took off, what the Lib Dems might do?

That said, any new party would need to be led from the off by a skilful, common-sense communicator capable of simultaneously radiating both competence and compassion. And it would also have to avoid kidding itself into thinking there was any mileage in promising to Brexit. Moreover, contrary to the advice of confirmed internationalists like Nick Clegg, for example, it would also have to avoid adopting, at least in opposition, an over-assertively liberal stance on immigration, welfare, crime and education.

**Summing up**

There is a sweet spot in Britain’s electoral and party system. It is where the majority of voters are – namely, centrist (and maybe even slightly to the left) on the economy and public services, but rather closed/authoritarian/restrictive (whatever you want to call it) on some of the issues just mentioned. At the moment, Theresa May’s Conservative Party occupies that space, just as Tony Blair’s Labour Party occupied it before her. Unless and until Labour moves back to regain it, she and her successors will continue to rule the country. If Labour proves unable to make that move within months of the election, then it is in serious danger of being replaced, not by Britain’s minor parties, one of which (UKIP) looks anyway as if it’s on the way out, but by a new entrant. That, rather than the landslide victory the Tories look set to achieve, is why this summer, like last summer, could be a truly historic one for British politics.