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Issue Brief

British Elections: Cementing Theresa May's Premiership

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A little less than a year into the Brexit referendum, Britain will head to the polls once again. On April 18, Theresa May left the public and parliamentarians astounded as she called for general elections to be held



on the June 8, 2017. Amidst national debates around the nature of Britain's exit from the EU resonating throughout the parliament and public spheres, an election call has political parties struggling to rally electoral support.

Polls suggest that Theresa May's genius reflected in the call for election will see the Conservative Party strengthen their hold over the reins in the parliament. It was with this very intention to channel uniform support over her Brexit agenda in the light of intensified polarization that May announced her decision. Formerly, having campaigned for the 'remain' camp, May has taken up an 'out means out' stance since accepting premiership of the United Kingdom. She has made clear, in no uncertain terms, that Britain is sure to withdraw from the Union after assuredly striking the 'best deal' possible. Her stance for Brexit includes:¹

1. **Certainty** in the negotiations directing Britain's exit approved only after the Parliament's consent.
2. **Control** over laws made and executed in Britain, not the European Court.
3. **Strengthening** the union between England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales.
4. **Prevent** stricter border controls with Northern Ireland owing to their 'special relationship'.
5. **Controlling** migration in the light of the issue being an underlying support for Brexit.

¹ Dan Bloom, "Theresa May's 12-point plan for Brexit in full: PM finally reveals basis for EU exit negotiation." *Mirror*, January 18, 2017.

6. **Guaranteeing** the rights of EU migrants living and serving in Britain at the time of vote.
7. **Protect** rights of the workers holding true to EU labor laws
8. **Quit** the EU single market and free movement of goods, services, capital and people.
9. **Quit** the custom union's membership and renegotiate the terms of the CU after further deliberation and analysis of new trade deals
10. **A deal** to strengthen cooperation between Europe in science, technology, research and innovation.
11. **Cooperation** within Europe on countering terrorism and crime.
12. **A 'phased'** framework for long-term cooperation and development in Europe.

It is no secret that Brexit remains the core issue around which political parties are formulating their election narrative. Tony Blair, the former Prime Minister from the Labor Party cited Brexit as the "Dominant election issue"². Blair's remarks come at a time when the Labor Party is marred by internal rifts and an apparent lack of unifying leadership on the part of Jeremy Corbyn. A mere 44% in the Labor Party are willing to let Corbyn carry the onus of the left wing into the elections.³ The British Communist Party, however, has declared its support for Labor presenting a consolidated front for the left wing under the flagship of Jeremy Corbyn⁴. Wielding the aspirations of the left, Corbyn who only modestly showed support for the 'remain' campaign last year, finds himself scurrying for popular support.

Referring to Brexit being the central point of campaign, Tony Blair went on record to state that "This is something that is bigger than party allegiance in this particular election".⁵The statement points to Corbyn who, hoping to deviate from the narrative, has tried to shift focus onto the reformation of the National Health Service, tax and education system. Not only is that line of campaign futile because of the

² Vincent Wood, "Tony Blair begs Corbyn to fight against Hard Brexit as Labour faces election annihilation." *Express*, April 25, 2017.

³ NewStatesman, "Is it too late to replace Jeremy Corbyn as labour leader before the general election?" *NewStatesman*.

⁴ Ashley Cowburn, "General election: British Communist Party will not field any candidates and throws support behind Jeremy Corbyn." *Independent*, April 24, 2017.

⁵ Emilio Casalicchio, "Tony Blair: Brexit is bigger than party allegiance in general election." *Politics Home*, April 23, 2017.

Brexit debate headlining common discourse, but the Conservative Party's performance leading up to the EU referendum showed robust economic improvement.⁶

Gaining ground accruing Labor's inadequacy, The Liberal Democrats have raised a staggering £1.6 million since May's call for election.⁷ The Democrats led by Tim Farron, not unlike the Green Party have been campaigning against May's implementation of Brexit measures. The Democrats in fact demand another EU referendum. 'Tactical voting' is burgeoning as the most preferred line of action for opposition parties and campaign groups inclusive of "Open Britain" and an initiative endorsed by Gina Miller⁸. The purpose of tactical voting is to strategically rally support against the Conservative stance on Brexit in urban constituencies which voted to 'remain' in the EU last year. The Green Party acquiesced its seat in the Ealing district to Labor in an effort to tactically subdue the Tory lead.⁹

On the forefront of the opposition to May's government is the Scottish National Party which has intensified its called for a second Scottish referendum citing Scottish aspirations of reintegrating into the EU. May, however has rebuked any notion of a second Scottish independence vote.¹⁰

Despite collaborative efforts drawn by opposition parties and campaign groups, May's call for election is nothing short of a political masterstroke. Not only has she turned the tables on the Brexit narrative, but has delivered the Tories the most felicitous moment to establish an unassailable lead in the Parliament. If, as the polls suggest, the Conservatives come through with an impressive victory, Theresa May and her party will end up owning the Brexit narrative which will reshape British relations with Europe.

⁶ Ben Chu, "What has happened to the economy under a year of Tory government-in six charts." *Independent*, May 6, 2016.

⁷ Samuel Osborne, "Liberal Democrats have raised £1.6 million since call for general election, Tim Farron says," *Independent*, April 23, 2017.

⁸ Helena Horton, "Gina Miller launches tactical voting initiative against Theresa May's Brexit plans," *The Telegraph*, April 20, 2017.

⁹ May Bulman, Green Party pulls out of crucial general election seat to help Labour beat Tories," *Independent*, April 25, 2017.

¹⁰ Simon Johnson, "Theresa May tells Nicole Srurgeon 'now is not the time' for second independence referendum," *The Telegraph*, March 16, 2017.