

The 2017 General Election we weren't expecting

Since becoming Prime Minister, Theresa May has insisted that she wasn't going to cut and run. Although the Conservatives have consistently held a substantial lead over Labour, she has resisted calls from within her own party to hold a snap general election and has been adamant that her government would run its full five-year term.

Her change of heart this morning therefore came as a bolt out of the blue. This was her statement in full:-

"I have just chaired a meeting of the Cabinet, where we agreed that the Government should call a general election, to be held on June 8th.

"I want to explain the reasons for that decision, what will happen next and the choice facing the British people when you come to vote in this election.

"Last summer, after the country voted to leave the European Union, Britain needed certainty, stability and strong leadership, and since I became Prime Minister the Government has delivered precisely that.

"Despite predictions of immediate financial and economic danger, since the referendum we have seen consumer confidence remain high, record numbers of jobs, and economic growth that has exceeded all expectations.

"We have also delivered on the mandate that we were handed by the referendum result".

Of course, Mrs May cannot ask the Queen to dissolve Parliament. The Fixed Term Parliaments Act, passed under David Cameron in 2011, requires Parliament to serve a full five year

term unless there is either a successful vote of no confidence in the Government or else two-thirds of MPs back an early election. Can Mrs May achieve that majority? With Jeremy Corbyn, Tim Farron and Nicola Sturgeon all enthusiastic to fight another General election, she stands a reasonable chance. However, assuming that every Tory MP will support their leader, this still requires every SNP and Lib Dem MP to do likewise along with at least 30 Labour MPs. If some MPs abstain and enough Labour MPs are fearful for their seats, achieving this figure may prove a bit challenging.

Presumably Mrs May and her supporters have been taking soundings, for if she fails to gain the necessary support, it would not look good for her, especially as she would then be going into the all-important Brexit negotiations from a weakened position. The only other alternatives for a snap election – calling a vote of no confidence in her own government or seeking to repeal the 2011 act, which would require approval of the House of Lords – do not look very likely.

Assuming that she does secure a majority, from the perspective of the Campaign for an Independent Britain, this will be a very different election from anything in the recent past. Being a cross-party campaign organisation, our focus has been to encourage voters to support candidates supportive of withdrawal from the EU, regardless of their party allegiance. With the vote to leave and the triggering of Article 50 behind us, the dynamics have changed considerably, particularly as many former remain-supporting Tories along with a significant minority of their Labour colleagues have insisted that they will honour last June's vote and will not be obstructive of Brexit. Our task, therefore, will be to highlight obstructive individuals – either sitting MPs or candidates – while encouraging voters to support any candidate who is committed to the UK securing a good Brexit deal, whatever party they come from.

We can but hope that this election, rather than resurrecting the animosity of the Brexit campaign, will give us a Parliament which will carry out the wishes of the people as expressed last June and work constructively to secure such a successful exit from the EU that by the time the next General Election takes place, it will no longer be an issue for the UK electorate.