

UK general election: The view from across Europe



The Conservative Party's victory in the UK's general election was keenly watched elsewhere across Europe. [Stuart Brown](#) presents an overview of analysis and reactions from the continent.

“Johnson convinced a majority of voters he could get them out of a maze in which they had been stuck for more than three years”

[Le Monde](#) writes that whatever one may think about Boris Johnson's “disdain for details”, he has won a “masterful victory”. [ElPaís](#) notes that while the future of the NHS and the “revolutionary economic proposals” of the Labour Party have been discussed at length, the election remained about Brexit and “Johnson convinced a majority of voters that he could get them out of a maze in which they had been stuck for more than three years”.

[Benjamin Triebe](#), writing for the *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, focuses on the economic impact of the election. He argues the rise in the value of the pound that occurred after the polls closed suggests the prevailing sentiment is that it is better to have “a sure Brexit than an insecure socialism”. [Spiegel](#) has a roundup of reactions across Europe, with perhaps the most memorable line coming from the Swedish newspaper *Aftonbladet*, which concludes that “we can be happy the circus will be over – even if the clown stays on stage”.

Labour's defeat

Labour were the clear losers of the night, with Jeremy Corbyn indicating that he would not lead the party in a future election campaign. [Kristian Steinnes](#), a Professor at the Norwegian University of Science and Technology, cites the impact of tactical voting in traditional Labour areas as an important element in the result: “several traditional Labour areas strongly favour Brexit but are sceptical of the Conservatives... many have ultimately considered Brexit as being more important than supporting Labour”. Elsewhere, Jakub Krupa highlights Corbyn's low personal approval ratings in the role of opposition leader as a key factor.

Jedna z kilku grafik, które pozwolą łatwiej zrozumieć to, co się wydarzyło w czwartek. Wyborcy nie znoszą Jeremy'ego Corbyna – i to także wyborcy jego własnego ugrupowania. <https://t.co/lAWwmfzkww>

— Jakub Krupa (@JakubKrupa) [December 13, 2019](#)

Pol Morillas, Director of the Barcelona Centre for International Affairs, states that Corbyn's inability to craft a strong alternative to Johnson's message effectively handed victory to the Conservatives.

"Ante el asunto más importante de la política británica en décadas, Corbyn dijo que se mantendría neutral. El hartazgo de la sociedad junto con la falta de alternativa al mensaje de Johnson ha dado una victoria acaparadora a los conservadores" [@polmorillas https://t.co/aLpPbmLT9b](https://t.co/aLpPbmLT9b)
[pic.twitter.com/XCa5L4Q2jY](https://t.co/aLpPbmLT9b)

— CIDOB Barcelona (@CidobBarcelona) [December 13, 2019](#)

Meanwhile, Yanis Varoufakis calls the result “a spectacular own goal for the extreme centre who chose to conduct a war of attrition against Corbyn's sensible Brexit”.

A victory for the politics of division and a spectacular own goal for the extreme centre who chose to conduct a war of attrition against J. Corbyn's sensible Brexit, while treating Leavers & democracy with contempt. Little Englandism triumphed vs a genuinely United Kingdom.

— Yanis Varoufakis (@yanisvaroufakis) [December 13, 2019](#)

“Scotland, the thorn in Johnson's side, risks becoming a new Catalonia”

Alongside the Conservatives, the other big winners of the night were the Scottish National Party, who significantly increased their share of the seats in Scotland and now claim to hold a mandate for a second referendum on Scottish independence. In the words of the SNP's leader, [Nicola Sturgeon](#): "People in Scotland have made it very clear they didn't want Boris Johnson as Prime Minister and they don't want Brexit... There is a mandate now to offer the people of Scotland the choice over their own future."

Antonello Guerrera, the London correspondent for [la Repubblica](#), states that Scotland is now a "thorn in Johnson's side" and that the situation risks becoming a replica of the standoff over independence in Catalonia. [El Mundo](#) describes the result as an "independence wave" which provides momentum for another referendum in 2020. Robert Shrimpsley at the [Financial Times](#) takes a similar line, writing that "while the Conservatives secured Brexit, they may lose the UK" and that "the next few years will be dominated by the next stage of the UK's departure and the fight to keep Scotland in the Union".

What next?

Leadership elections are now on the horizon for both Labour and the Liberal Democrats. [Le Figaro](#) profiles Corbyn's period as Labour leader and assesses where the party's future might lie. They also feature an interview with LSE's Tony Travers, who explains that British politics has undergone a major realignment, given the Conservatives now represent many lower income households in traditional manufacturing areas in northern England.

Finally, [Die Welt](#) asks whether the large majority Johnson now enjoys will increase the likelihood of a soft Brexit, citing diplomatic sources who indicate he made a positive impression on European leaders during their meetings in October. The article concludes there is now little reason for the British Prime Minister to follow the wishes of hardline Brexiteers and a "harmonious" relationship between the UK and the EU may be possible. Charles Michel, President of the European Council, indicated on Friday morning that the "EU is ready for the next phase" and "will negotiate a future trade deal which ensures a true level playing field".

I would like to congratulate [@BorisJohnson](#) on his victory.

We expect a vote on the withdrawal agreement as soon as possible. [#EU](#) is ready for the next phase. We will negotiate a future trade deal which ensures a true level playing field.

— Charles Michel (@eucopresident) [December 13, 2019](#)

Note: This article does not represent the position of EUROPP – European Politics and Policy or the London School of Economics. Featured image credit: [Number 10 \(CC BY-NC-ND 2.0\)](#)



Stuart Brown – LSE

Stuart Brown is the Managing Editor of EUROPP and a Research Associate at the LSE's European Institute.