

Hard, soft or none at all: what the election result will mean for Brexit

The General Election will set Britain on the path to a hard or softer Brexit – or perhaps no Brexit at all. Ros Taylor (LSE) explains what each possible outcome means for the next stage of the UK's withdrawal from the EU.

Conservative majority

Supposedly, a vote for the Conservatives is a vote to 'get Brexit done' – but the reality is more complicated. Boris Johnson will be able to formally leave the EU at the end of January and enter a transitional period in which he expects to negotiate a deal. But this period will end in December 2020 and the majority of experts believe it will be extremely difficult to secure a trade deal before then. If Johnson did, the agreement likely to be struck would still be [very disruptive](#) to British business; and if he did not, he has promised to exit definitively by December, raising the spectre of no deal.

The NIESR has analysed the benefit of the trade deals Johnson hopes to strike with non-EU countries and concludes it would be ['small'](#). The LSE's Centre for Economic Performance has [predicted](#) how the different deals on offer would hit the UK economy.

However, the UK in a Changing Europe think-tank has [suggested](#) that Johnson might manage to extend the transition period by framing it differently for public consumption. The deadline for the negotiation of any extension is 30 June.

Labour majority

The Labour promise is to quickly secure a 'better' deal with the EU and then hold a second referendum, both within six months. The choice on the ballot paper would be between Jeremy Corbyn's deal and Remain.



Jeremy Corbyn launches Labour's General Election campaign in Battersea, October 2019.
Photo: [Jeremy Corbyn](#). Public domain

The UCL Constitution Unit [says](#) it would be extremely difficult to organise a referendum in less than 22 weeks, which makes this timetable very tight. Furthermore, the details of the Labour deal would be minimal and indicate a direction of travel rather than agreement on issues like trade. However, it would in theory keep the UK in the customs union, 'aligned' with the Single Market and accepting EU regulation in the same way that Norway does. The UK would also stay in various agencies and funding arrangements like Horizon 2020, and there would be security co-operation. Whether freedom of movement (FoM) would continue is unclear (it would be '[subject to negotiations](#)'). Given the issue is no longer as politically salient as it once was, Labour may choose to enforce [existing limitations on FoM](#) more strictly.

Liberal Democrat majority

In this vanishingly unlikely scenario, Article 50 would be revoked and Britain would stay in the EU.

Hung parliament

The Brexit Party is polling too poorly to have a chance of picking up seats and going into coalition with the Conservatives, and the Democratic Unionist Party is very reluctant to prop up a Johnson government after he negotiated a deal that would create a hard border in the Irish Sea. It is just conceivable, but very unlikely, that the Lib Dems would countenance an arrangement with the Conservatives that guaranteed a second referendum. A hung parliament would therefore probably see Labour, the Scottish National Party, Plaid Cymru and potentially the Greens sharing power; the Lib Dems might engage in an informal arrangement. A second referendum would ensue. This is the scenario on which many pro-Remain groups are [pinning their hopes](#).

This post represents the views of the author and not those of the Brexit blog, nor LSE.