

## I will mourn the Conservative Party

Published: January 13, 2026, 3:20 am

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For all its manifold weaknesses I will mourn the Conservative Party when it has gone. The most successful electoral fighting machine in democratic history has looked to be intent on tearing itself apart, and now Boris Johnson has decided to campaign against David Cameron on the EU this fate seems certain to occur.

I may be wrong (the Conservatives have, maybe, survived other such challenges, but not in the modern era of politics) but I cannot see how a party so viscerally divided on an issue so fundamental to the perception of political concern amongst so many of its members can survive as a cohesive unit when open warfare will be so readily permitted for such an extended period with the outcome so significant to the fate of the country it thinks it has a natural right to govern.

It is not the campaign, as such, that I see to be the threat, but the aftermath. It seems likely that this fight will be close. It may well be that the votes of Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland could be critical. All this could be crucial to the perception with the Conservative Party as to just what their politics is for. This is already pro-inequality (just look at the policies on inheritance tax and social security), pro-banking (look at the EU negotiation and recent moves on the FCA), pro making the UK a tax haven (the corporation tax changes) and pro-England (look at the Smith Commission and EVEL). A vote that divided the country, and lead to Brexit, perceived to be lead by a Tory opposed to the Prime Minister would undoubtedly lead to his fall and a massive swing to the right in politics that a significant part of the Conservative Party would, I hope, find hard to stomach.

If, more likely (and I genuinely think this is the case at present), Brexit is rejected then many in the Conservative Party will reflect their anger back on their leadership, who unsurprisingly will be unwilling to leave office in that situation, and the chance of a party split seems very high.

Brexit should not be a debate about the future of the Conservative Party: it is so much more important than that. But that is what it is likely to be.

I sincerely hope people vote without taking this into account but as an observer I cannot help but take interest in this other issue. And, to be candid, to also worry about it. I have differences with all political parties. A period of disruption at a time of economic uncertainty may not be what the UK needs in the short term. But given the uncertainties that I think will be created it would be irresponsible not to have concern about where this will lead, even when many in the Conservative Party do not seem to share that sense of responsibility.