

We're 50:50 for hard Brexit now

Published: January 13, 2026, 10:59 am

My friend and occasional co-author Howard Reed [asked on the blog this morning](#):

What would you say is the probability of “no-deal Brexit” now Richard? I’d say it’s still less than 50% but growing all the time. It could happen if May’s deal is voted down but she refuses to cancel Article 50 and then Parliament simply runs out of time before 29 March. There seems to be no sense of urgency to avoid a national crisis and that’s very damning.

I happen to think that's an excellent question. And one of the most important of the moment.

My answer is that the risk is high. And my concern is that very few people seem to realise this, including a majority of MPs.

As a matter of fact if nothing else happens we leave the EU on 29th March without a deal. The law to make this happen already exists: the Commons has already passed it. And unless positive action is taken to prevent it, this will occur, come what may.

In that case the question is, in effect, whether or not there is a chance that some action might be taken to prevent this happening. Those actions might include:

- * Adopting May's deal;
- * The holding of a general election;
- * Calling a second referendum;
- * Postponing Article 50 to let a referendum happen;
- * Agreeing what question a second referendum might pose;
- * Calling a second referendum;
- * Cancelling Article 50.

I have listed events in likely approximate order.

Let's start with what is not going to happen. May's deal is not going to happen. There is no majority.

And a general election is not going to happen. There is no way May is going to agree to it, and she would have to.

Nor will there be a successful no-confidence vote. The anti-Corbyn alliance is too strong for that. So an election will not be forced on May.

We then arrive in mid-January with no Deal.

There will be near panic amongst sane MPs about this. But MP do not control the Common's business. However, Grieve succeeded in giving them a say. When that happens then, and only then I suspect is there a chance of forcing a delay to Article 50 and a second vote.

I do not believe anyone has the courage to actually just cancel Article 50 without a second vote.

May's deal is by then dead so the only choices left are stay or hard Brexit. That, then, would have to be the question on the ballot.

Who will win that? I am not sure.

So there is a real risk of Hard Brexit for this reason.

And a real risk of Hard Brexit because May will not allow anything else once her deal fails.

What are the overall odds? More than 50% I would say right now. And that is despite maybe 10% of the Commons wanting it.

Split the difference between me and Howard and it is 50:50, I'd say.

We're that close to a disaster.

Because there is no good hard Brexit.