

UK politics will fail the country today. What we need i...

Published: January 14, 2026, 10:31 am

Theresa May will lose in the Commons today. And badly. That is accepted fact, it seems. Just as it is accepted fact that this will not require her to resign. And that it will not follow that Labour can win a vote of no confidence. Or that Labour can win the call of a general election. Let alone that it could win such an election against a Tory Party so divided it is hard to recognise that it has any real existence.

What we have is a political situation previously unimaginable in modern history. The reality is that politicians have proven that their own dogmatic divisions are now so great that their parties are incapable of governing. But as a consequence of the paralysis that those same divisions have created we face economic, social, constitutional and even existential crises as a nation. And the two leading political parties are seemingly unable to do anything to resolve this at present. That is because they lack the vision, leadership, conviction and unity to do so. There is no point pretending otherwise. And bluster from left, centre and right does not change that.

The difficulty is the vulnerability that this situation creates. The best outcome anyone now talks about over the next few days is that Article 50 notice might be extended. The EU appears open to this. But a reason is required. That requires one be agreed upon. It is not clear what that might be.

Is it to have a new referendum? It to take part in electing new MEPs? Or to have a general election? All are plausible reasons for delay, although whether we would be permitted to partake in European elections when still planning to leave is hard to guess. But the question has to be asked, what would any of these resolve?

The UK political tradition is to take big ideas to the electorate and seek their endorsement. The big ideas have always been underpinned by class traditions in England, and other factors to varying degrees in the other constituent nations. But that has still required that the parties present unified and cohesive platforms to an electorate that they can then claim provide them with a mandate for action.

The failure of the UK political tradition that we are now witnessing is capable of

summary in this context. Neither party is capable of presenting a cohesive manifesto that can attract support within it to the electorate for the latter's endorsement.

Most Tory members want to leave the EU. Most Tory MPs do not want to leave. A vociferous minority very strongly disagree with the majority. The Prime Minister is known to believe one thing and act as if another is true. Leadership is impossible in that environment.

In Labour, most members and MPs want to stay in the EU. A vociferous but quite small minority disagree. They happen to include the leadership that says it wishes to remain, or to stay close to the EU but very obviously really wishes to leave.

The SNP emerges as the only large parliamentary party with a policy largely agreed by its membership, leadership and MPs. That happens to only destabilise the situation by making majority government in the UK even less likely.

But the question then is, whether it reasonable in this situation to ask the people of the UK to decide on what to do next? Given that there is a political failure on this issue within the framework with which everyone in the UK is familiar with why should people be asked to decide instead of politicians? And on the basis of what evidence? Presented by whom? I do not know. So I cannot be sure that such elections are what are required now. It would be recognition of total political failure, and would at best perpetuate the current mess or make it worse.

So what could be done? I wrote [this in June 2016](#) before the referendum result was known, and when I presumed there would be a 2020 general election:

I suspect the Article 50 exit negotiations will be incomplete in 2020. The EU will wish for that. Being able to demonstrate the crippling impact of attempting to leave on the UK will be vital to other member states wishing to crush their own exit movements.

So what of 2020 in this case? I would like to think that a coalition dedicated to these things might be elected:

- * *Electoral reform*
- * *House of Lords reform*
- * *EU readmission on revised terms*
- * *A national economic plan.*

This government should, I suggest, seek a mandate for no more than two years. Then there would be new elections and a referendum on the terms for re-admission to the EU.

I happen to think this is still the only way forward.

Who could ensure that this happens? Probably only the Speaker. And who might be in such a government, let alone who might lead it? I think that is another debate.

What we need is a plan for progression. I happen to think this is the best there is.

And I think the EU would accept a delay on this basis, which would be described as there being a constitutional crisis in the UK.