

Election, anyone?

Published: January 15, 2026, 4:08 pm

It's amazing how geography changes perspective. I am in Brussels this morning to attend the final conference of the EU funded Horizon 2020 academic research programme I have been engaged in over the last three years. There is a sense of relief at being even a little distant from the UK and all the failings so apparent in its political systems at present. Never has the apparent order of the EU seemed so attractive.

But all such perceptions are no more than that: they do not change reality. That reality is that the UK remains as much in a mess as it has been since David Cameron called a referendum in Europe. It continues to be hopelessly divided with almost no obvious way out of that mess.

Will an election really resolve matters? Some in the Tories clearly think so. Those who believe Corbyn walks in water during election campaigns clearly think likewise. Their optimism is misplaced in both cases, I think.

I can read opinion polls. Some Tories are clearly believing them. So did Theresa May. She got it wrong. And this time the difference is not May's inadequacies, obvious as it became apparent that they were, but Johnson's failure to deliver Brexit. When do or die by 31 October was the only basis for his appeal and it has not happened, the shine becomes very tarnished. The honeymoon is over. Even the winning of one parliamentary vote will not be enough. I predict Farage will inflict more damage on the Tories than any current poll suggests. In the Brexit marginals Johnson's appeal has gone, I suspect. He too has failed. And that's to Labour's overall advantage, probably.

As for Labour, still as it is without a clear Brexit strategy (and please don't tell me it has one, because it's glaringly obvious that it has not got one the public will understand), the chances of a win are small. You simply cannot fight an election on the biggest issue of the day saying 'we'll tell you what we think in due course'. That may work in a Constituency Labour Party meeting, but with the public it's a non-starter. They expect politicians to know what they think. The result is that Labour will hemorrhage seats to the LibDems and Tories, and even in one or two cases to the Brexit Party. I see no way even a good campaign by Corbyn will change that now. But his campaigning skill will

help: the losses will not be of the scale YouGov, in particular, likes to predict.

And where will we end up? Who knows? But I suspect a great many MPs fear it will be pretty much where we are now, with a hung parliament. There will be one or two fewer DUP, more SNP and LibDems, more Tories (because the ones thrown out will stay out) and fewer Labour MPs. But overall? There will still, I think, be a hung parliament. Because that is exactly where the country is. It is divided.

So, election anyone? is the right question. But the answer is a referendum I am afraid, and not a general election.

I can't see another way forward as yet.

I have no great desire for another referendum. But I do wish this matter to be resolved. I think a referendum the only way out of that. But this time the decision will have to be binding, either way.