

# Johnson would really rather lose this election, but may...

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What does one say about a general election? Essentially, that it was inevitable. But, I stress, only because that is the way the Tories have played it.

From making Europe an issue when no one was previously concerned about it; to having a referendum that took a long time to excite; to not knowing what to do when they lost it; to calling red lines that made no sense; to having a general election that resulted in rejection; to making unholy deals with the DUP; to presenting a Deal that appeased almost no one; to then holding a leadership election; to then not negotiating; to proroguing parliament unnecessarily and illicitly; to having a meaningless Queen's Speech; to presenting another deal few could abide; to now calling an election that looks like an act of further desperation; the message from the government is clear even if every word will deny it: the Tories will do anything to avoid facing three real issues.

The first is the consequence of their own decisions in government. Austerity was unnecessary, and a disaster unless your goal was to shrink the role of government and create misery, stress and a decline in the quality of every public service when the demand was, of course, that things got better. As a distraction Brexit has been a gift that just keeps giving when it comes to the denial of the incompetence of Cameron and Osborne and all who have followed in their path.

Second, the Tories cannot face the fact that the model in which they have placed their faith for well over a generation - and to which many of them have never experienced an alternative - is broken beyond repair. Neoliberalism died in 2008 and should have been buried. This model of trickle (or even flood) up economics was proven not to work, unless creating instability, social tension, excessive private debt, inequality and social injustice alongside business with almost no incentive to really innovate on any issue bar tax and regulatory avoidance was the goal.

And third? That is the Tory's own reluctance to govern. You can't eventually argue for small government, leaving everything to the market and letting 'the people' (or, at least, those with fat wallets) decide and actually govern. The paradox of doing so eventually, and inevitably, conflicts with your beliefs in that case. So you really needed

something to distract from your lack of willing to do anything. And Brexit is it for the UK's Tories, who have a contempt for the posts that they now hold (and enjoy, if only for the gravy train they promise to them, as Ruth Davidson has so inelegantly shown) that knows no limit.

So what is the worst outcome of this election for the Tories and Johnson as their archetypal leader par excellence, in that of all of them he has least conviction in his capacity to govern and most in his ability to blame? That would be winning, outright. Because that would mean there could be no more excuses.

They would have to do a job.

They would have to divide the UK as is now the Unionist Brexit promise.

It would mean delivering lower living standards.

And even worse public services.

It would mean business failures.

It will mean they are responsible for the next banking crisis.

It will mean that they have to explain that Brexit actually means having to do a deal with the EU that might require freedom of movement, an effective customs union and the reality of single market rules if we are to get market access.

And it will mean explaining that any freedom for bankers to pursue tax haven policies will come at the cost of restrictions and loss to ordinary people.

Do any of the Tories really have the appetite for the grief this will cause them? I fear Raab, Truss and Javid are deluded enough to think they have. But Johnson? I don't see it. Because I see no conviction in him at all. And in that divide is the Tory weakness.

The trouble for Johnson is that the people might not see his fear of winning. They might give him a majority after all.

I suggest this is an election Johnson wants, but wants to lose, whilst having most seats. Prevarication suits him well. My only concern is that he may not get what he really wants.