

# U.K.: Tory split or general election?

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**You'll have noticed that some of the supermarkets have already started displaying Christmas merchandise writes Andy Stowe. You might even have begun mentally drafting your letter to Santa saying "please bring me a Labour government with Jeremy Corbyn as prime minister. I'd also really like to have the utter collapse of the Tories into half a dozen factions fighting each other to the political death before the end of the year."**

Five years ago, you'd have been more likely to have found a talking unicorn under the tree on December 25<sup>th</sup>, but now both are within the range of gifts you could possibly receive.

The [Sunday Times has reported](#) (*paywall*) that Theresa May has instructed her aides to prepare for a general election in November. Labour is also planning for the possibility of a November election. That said, we know that the British ruling class, with the enthusiastic support of its representatives in the Labour Party, will move heaven and earth to try to prevent a Corbyn Labour government. On the other hand, Theresa May was comprehensively humiliated at the EU Salzburg summit at which she vainly tried to flog her dead horse Chequers Brexit deal. [The Economist](#) wrote: "The European establishment not only said that her proposed Brexit deal, hammered out in July with her cabinet at Chequers, her country retreat, was dead."

Like a mean teenager picking on the weak kid, Donald Tusk even [ridiculed her on Instagram](#). It's the latest humiliation in a prime ministerial career distinguished only by her capacity to endure ordeals that microbes living in the hydrothermal vents of undersea volcanoes would find a bit rough.

At a September meeting of hard right Tory MPs several were reported as saying of May to anyone who'd listen "how best do we get rid of her?" 'she's a disaster', 'this can't go on'.

Tory parliamentarians tend to fight their very vicious internal battles in a rather cleaner, more political way than the Labour right. They don't spread slanderous lies about their leader's antisemitism. They have the added advantage that when Theresa May is interviewed by Tory activist and BBC journalist Nick Robinson for [national TV](#) he doesn't ask awkward questions like "Mrs May, why is your party in a de facto alliance with a Hungarian government which the [Israeli press](#) routinely calls antisemitic?" Salzburg showed us that tolerating a racist anti-Semite like Orban is worth doing for May because he's the only EU leader willing to support her in public.

The British state's relationship with the European Union has been a source of potential Tory schism for more than a generation. What's new is that some Tory MPs are now openly talking about walking away from the party in the event that Boris Johnson becomes leader, though this has more to do with his presentational style and increasingly explicit racism more than anything else.

## Tory "Leninists"

While that buffoon gets most of the headlines, it's the [European Research Group](#) (ERG) which does the programmatic heavy lifting for the hardcore pro-Brexit Tories. It's chaired by Jacob Rees-Mogg, which may be the reason it doesn't have a website. It organises around fifty MPs and produces [position](#)

[papers](#). It is a serious faction, charging £2000 a year for membership, MPs are subject to a version of democratic centralism with a whipping system and it doesn't reveal who its members are.

Despite the party's factionalised condition it is highly improbable that there will be a Conservative split of any significance. Two MPs defected to UKIP when it was in the ascendant. Many who stayed in shared UKIP's views on migration and the EU and their strategic choice has been vindicated. The Tory Brexit debate is being driven by the party's hard right. Base material interest also plays a part in their decision making. The British electoral system makes it very difficult for new parties to get people elected who aren't in a major party and sitting MPs are reluctant to gamble a good salary and extremely generous pensions on questions of principle.

May can't remain as prime minister for much longer. Johnson may be popular among his party's racist membership, but it's improbable that the British ruling class would give him the keys to Downing Street. The more likely successor is likely to be a less divisive and more credible figure like Jeremy Hunt, the foreign secretary.

If you've ever been in a car crash you'll know that it actually happens very quickly but seems to take place in hyper real slow motion. May is heading towards a no deal Brexit in much the same way. Her speech outside number 10 after she got back from Salzburg indicated what her strategy is going to be. She'll offload the responsibility for Brexit onto the European Union (EU), without actually explaining why the EU should come up with solutions for a British created problem. Her party will run a British nationalist election campaign in which anti-migrant messages will play a big part. It will be a grotesque spectacle of racist chauvinism.

We need to get rid of the Tories. Jeremy Corbyn is right to be calling for a general election. We can win this one.

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