

United Kingdom Election Result

June 14, 2017 (IN10717)

Related Author

- [Derek E. Mix](#)
-

Derek E. Mix, Analyst in European Affairs (dmix@crs.loc.gov, 7-9116)

The United Kingdom (UK) election of June 8, 2017, resulted in a hung parliament, an outcome in which no single party won a majority of seats in the 650-seat House of Commons. With 318 seats, the Conservative Party came in first place but lost the majority it had held after winning 331 seats in the 2015 election. The Labour Party came in second place, outperforming most expectations by winning 262 seats, a gain of 30.

Conservative-Led Minority Government Expected to Carry On

The Conservative Party currently is expected to continue leading the UK government, with Prime Minister Theresa May at its head. The prime minister has been seeking to conclude a deal for support from the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP), the largest unionist political party in Northern Ireland, which holds 10 seats. The arrangement is not expected to be a formal coalition but rather a "[confidence and supply](#)" arrangement that allows the DUP certain concessions in return for its support in passing the budget and backing the government in any no-confidence votes. Legislation typically is supported on a case-by-case basis, potentially granting the DUP a highly pivotal role.

The DUP is one of the UK's most socially conservative parties and campaigned strongly in favor of the UK exiting the European Union ("Brexit"). Nearly 56% of voters in Northern Ireland supported remaining in the EU. Since 2007, the DUP has [led Northern Ireland's devolved government](#) in a power-sharing arrangement with Irish nationalist party Sinn Fein. Concessions to the DUP [likely will include](#) more resources for Northern Ireland and a role in Brexit negotiations. The DUP opposes negotiating any special status for Northern Ireland and is eager to avoid a "hard" border between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland.

Overall, [withdrawal negotiations with the EU](#) are set to remain the UK's government's top concern. With the clock ticking on a presumed March 2019 exit, Prime Minister May faces renewed pressure to [soften](#) the government's approach from the strategy it [outlined earlier this year](#) for a "hard Brexit," meaning a full departure from the EU single market and customs union and a full restoration of British sovereignty over lawmaking, including with regard to controlling immigration. In the short term, speculation has surfaced about whether the negotiating round planned for June 19 might be postponed until questions about the UK's political situation and negotiating stance have been resolved. Adding to the uncertainty are considerable doubts about the longer-term sustainability of both May's leadership position and the Conservative-DUP partnership.

Table 1. June 2017 UK General Election Results

Party	# of Seats	Net # of Seats +/-	% of Vote
Conservative Party	318	-13	42.4%
Labour Party	262	+30	40%
Scottish National Party	35	-21	3%
Liberal Democrats	12	+4	7.4%
Democratic Unionist Party	10	+2	0.9%
UK Independence Party	0	-1	1.8%
All Others	13	-1	4.5%

Source: "[Election Ends in Hung Parliament](#)," BBC News.

Note: Turnout was 68.7%.

Fluctuating Political Dynamics

The election result was not what Prime Minister May had in mind on April 18 when she reversed her earlier assertions and unexpectedly announced a snap election shortly after initiating the two-year window for negotiating Brexit with the EU. At that time, polls showed a 20-point Conservative lead over Labour, and May expected to solidify her political mandate for the negotiations with an expanded majority and to gain two years in the electoral calendar in which to manage the withdrawal process (by pushing the next general election back from 2020 to 2022).

Polls showed the lead shrinking as the vote neared, however, which observers attribute to a variety of factors. Prime Minister May's campaign sought to portray her leadership as the only choice for preserving stability and delivering Brexit, but some commentators [criticized](#) her efforts as stiff and lacking in vigor. Many observers interpret the result as a reflection of considerable voter unease about Brexit and the government's approach to the negotiations, pointing to higher turnout among [young voters](#) especially. The Labour Party was relatively effective in [focusing on concerns](#) about proposed Conservative social and economic policies, to the extent that some voters seemingly overcame doubts about Labour Party leader Jeremy Corbyn, often derided as too radically left-wing.

Other notable considerations include the following:

- After gaining 50 seats in the 2015 election, the Scottish National Party (SNP) lost 21 seats. This result deals a blow to the aspirations of some SNP leaders for a second vote on Scottish independence, following the 2014 referendum that favored staying in the UK.
- After positioning themselves as the most pro-Remain party in the Brexit debate, the Liberal Democrats made only modest gains, from 8 seats to 12.
- The Conservatives' losses occurred despite making inroads in Scotland and gaining vote share from the collapse of the populist, anti-EU UK Independence Party (UKIP). Labour also benefitted from an [unexpected return](#) of

UKIP voters in some parts of England.

The U.S.-UK Relationship

Many Members of Congress view the UK as the United States' closest ally. The two countries have long shared a strong political partnership, a unique defense and intelligence relationship, and similar economic views. Prime Minister May was the first foreign leader to visit President Trump following his inauguration, and despite considerable [negative sentiment](#) toward Trump in the UK she has sought to portray the UK's relationship with the United States as a balance in the context of Brexit. President Trump's [planned state visit](#) to the UK may be put on hold, however, both because of the UK's political turmoil and because he reportedly does not wish to go if there are large-scale protests against him.

Analysts believe that close U.S.-UK cooperation will continue for the foreseeable future in areas such as counterterrorism, economic issues, and the future of NATO, as well as numerous global and regional security challenges. Members of Congress have expressed support for the idea of a [U.S.-UK free-trade agreement](#), which could be negotiated after the UK's exit from the EU takes effect. At the same time, some Members of Congress may be concerned that the DUP's role in supporting the UK government [could complicate](#) talks to reestablish Northern Ireland's power-sharing executive and could undermine political stability in Northern Ireland and complicate further relations with the Republic of Ireland.