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‘We Didn’t See it Coming’:¹ The Conservatives

Theresa May’s decision to call an early election was clearly a foolish one—but only in hindsight. After all, opinion polls had been showing the Conservatives way ahead of Labour for months and they had not long before chalked up the first by-election gain from the opposition by a governing party for thirty-five years. Moreover, on almost every leadership measure one cared to mention, Mrs May was beating Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn hands down. And if anyone had counselled her to wait for the results of local election results before deciding, they could easily have been accused of looking unduly cautious: in the event, in England and Wales the Conservatives gained nearly 400 seats, Labour lost nearly 250 and UKIP over 140, while the much-anticipated Liberal Democrat revival came to nothing; north of the border, Labour and the SNP both lost support, allowing the Conservatives to claim second place. Hardly surprising, then, that all the talk was not of whether May would win but by how many seats, and what would that mean both for Brexit and the future of the Labour Party.

1. A personalised campaign with no personality

But behind the scenes at Conservative Central Office (CCHQ), apparently, not everything was tickety-boo. Well-sourced accounts (albeit conflicting ones) of the Conservative campaign suggest that it was, in fact, plagued with problems from the start (Shipman, 2017, McTague *et al.*, 2017). Overseas consultants Lynton Crosby, Mark Textor, and Jim Messina had, along with CCHQ veteran Stephen Gilbert, agreed to get the band back together in order to repeat their 2015 success. But not all of them were convinced that their new lead singer was entirely wise to have called the election in the first place (Walters, 2017).

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¹Theresa May, interviewed by Emma Barnett, BBC Radio 5 Live, 13 June 2017.

And none of the band, it seems, were happy with the influence and control afforded to her controversial personal managers, Nick Timothy and Fiona Hill (see [Perrior, 2017](#)). For their part (see [Timothy, 2017](#)) May's advisors were apparently unhappy at the way their boss was thrust front and centre of what, even in an era of personalized politics, started out as an exceptionally presidential campaign—one which, realising that voters were beginning to worry about the impact of continued austerity on key public services, aimed to capitalize on the fact that the PM was more popular than not only the leader of the opposition but her own party, too.

As a result, the party's direct mail and leaflets played down Tory candidates' Conservative Party affiliation in favour of associating them with the 'strong and stable' prime minister. But, May—by all accounts something of an introvert—was incapable of, or at least uncomfortable with, getting out there and convincingly selling herself. So, rather than being forced to meet ordinary voters, she was instead smuggled into all-ticket events in soulless out-of-town warehouses filled (if that's really the right word) with her own party activists gathered together at short notice for yet another unconvincing photo op. And even those rallies were too often held in constituencies that Labour held on to rather than in those which, in hindsight, the Tories should have been ensuring really were as safe as they, in their hubris, believed. Neither the optics nor the itinerary, in other words, did the PM or her party any favours.

Nor, in all probability, did May's reluctance to take part in the kind of televised debates that had enlivened the elections of 2010 and (to a lesser extent) 2015. That reluctance was understandable—a format that requires a politician to think on their feet and at least pretend to answer questions from 'real people' was unlikely to suit her (see [Prince, 2017](#)). And as the incumbent with a record to defend, as well as the apparent front-runner, May probably had more to lose than to gain from appearing. But when Labour suddenly announced that Jeremy Corbyn had decided, after all, to take part in the big, televised leaders' debate on 31 May, the PM's refusal to do the same made her look scared of getting into the ring with him—and she looked even worse, perhaps, when it was revealed that Home Secretary, Amber Rudd, who deputised for her, had agreed to do so just days after the death of her father. May's no-show also re-doubled what by then was already widespread criticism of a Conservative campaign clearly desperate to protect the woman who journalists had cruelly dubbed 'the Maybot' from contact with members of the public—in marked contrast to Labour's Jeremy Corbyn, who was constantly pictured speaking spontaneously and authentically to ecstatic crowds.

Yet when May did come into contact with 'real people', albeit in a television studio, it was immediately apparent why her minders had been so worried about the possibility. It might not have been a complete coincidence that things really began to slip away from the Conservatives after her appearance in front of a live studio audience less than a week from polling day, when, rather patronisingly

perhaps, she told a nurse complaining about her pay that ‘there isn’t a magic money tree that we can shake that suddenly provides for everything that people want.’ YouGov’s Political Tracker poll showed the Prime Minister’s net approval rating dropping from +18 on 11 May to +9 on 25 May and to -5 by 1 June. Wheeling out Boris Johnson, which some at CCHQ were now suggesting in the hope that he could inject a bit of life into the Conservative campaign, could have done nothing to arrest that slide. Indeed, the contrast between his shambling star-quality and her charisma by-pass would only have made things worse.

2. Underlying organizational and operational shortcomings

Even if Mrs May’s own performance hadn’t left so much to be desired, the Conservatives would still have had to cope with some long-term structural problems (see [Beckett, 2017](#)). The most obvious of these was that the party had (and still has) fewer members (circa 150,000 according to the most recent available estimate) and therefore almost certainly fewer activists, than its Labour rival (517,000 going into the election). Two years previously, the Tories got around this problem by organising *Team 2015* and bussing bunches of activists on ‘road trips’ to campaign in marginal constituencies. However, they dared not repeat the trick this time around after the resulting row over the allocation of costs between national and constituency campaign expenses got them into considerable trouble ([Electoral Commission, 2017](#)). As a result, the Conservatives’ ‘ground game’ almost certainly suffered in comparison to Labour’s.

Moreover, the Conservative ground game was further hobbled by CCHQ apparently insisting that the few volunteers local associations were able to muster should focus their voter contact effort on lists of likely supporters conjured from big data compiled at the centre rather than from locally-led canvassing—a decision which, according to many activists, led them to the homes of people who would never have voted Tory in a million years. Things weren’t made any better either when, as those activists began to report back that some of the Conservatives’ target seats looked less than winnable, there was little or no effort made to divert them back to defending seats that suddenly looked to be in danger.

These issues only served to fuel a degree of distrust between many local associations and Conservative Campaign Headquarters that had already been sparked by the way the latter (perhaps inevitably given the fact that May’s sudden announcement of an election left it only a couple of weeks to get things sorted) had short-circuited candidate selection procedures ([Wallace, 2017](#)). In constituencies where incumbent Tory MPs were stepping down, and in target seats, CCHQ was permitted to oblige local associations to choose from shortlists (some of them very short indeed) that it had put together without consultation, and in non-target seats it was allowed simply to impose a candidate—indeed, in

Table 3.1 Campaign activities of Conservative and Labour Party members, 2015-2017

% saying they did the following:	Conservative (N=1002)	Labour (N=1024)
Displayed election poster in window	21.6 (-8.0)	55.4 (+4.2)
Delivered leaflets	30.5 (-13.0)	31.6 (-10.9)
Attended public meeting or hustings	19.8 (-11.5)	24.9 (-6.5)
Canvassed face to face or by phone	21.3 (-15.2)	27.1 (-8.6)
'Liked' something by party/candidate on FB	39.3 (-0.3)	63.4 (+12.3)
Tweeted/re-tweeted party/candidate messages	24.2 (-1.8)	38.5 (+1.6)
Helped run party committee	7.0 (-5.0)	4.1 (-4.3)
Drove voters to polling stations	2.3 (-4.1)	4.8 (-2.4)
Other	10.2 (-6.1)	13.6 (-0.6)
None	24.7 (+1.7)	9.3 (-3.6)

Note: All figures are percentages. Figures in parenthesis represent percentage point changes 2015-2017.
 Source: Party Members Project surveys, 2015 and 2017. See <http://escrpartymembersproject.org>.

Scotland (with one or two exceptions) the latter was the norm. Attempts by associations to push back against such efforts proved fruitless in most cases, serving only to strain relations even further. Moreover, a number of would-be candidates (many of them activists) found themselves left out in the cold by an opaque and sometimes chaotic vetting system that had insufficient time to properly consider applicants' campaign records and, some complained, was designed to allow people favoured by 'the higher-ups' to get the official approval required to be placed on shortlists or imposed on associations. All in all, the process left a bad taste in the mouth of many grassroots members and did nothing to help morale—not good when the party was short of members in the first place and badly needed those it did have to enter the fray with enthusiasm.

The damage done to the morale of the Tory grassroots may go some way to explaining the relative decline in their campaign activity during the election. [Table 3.1](#) reveals that across a range of nine different activities about which the ESRC-funded Party Members Project asked party members during the election campaigns of 2015 and 2017, the percentages of Conservative members claiming to have done them dropped in every case. While this was also true of Labour's members in a number of cases, it was not so for all activities, and never by as much. The Tories suffered particularly notable drops in the proportion of members reporting having delivered leaflets, attended hustings and canvassed—the last of these being of obvious importance for mobilizing electoral support at constituency level. The mean change in the Conservative column of [Table 3.1](#) is -7.2, compared to just -1.7 for Labour—and Labour, of course, had four times as many members in the first place. When it came to grassroots campaign activity, then, the governing party was probably way behind the opposition.

In addition, CCHQ's much vaunted dominance over Labour when it came to digital campaigning in 2015 turned out to be ephemeral, always presuming that it wasn't merely a myth created by Cameron's surprise success last time round. Grassroots Conservatives are not renowned for being up with the latest developments in social media. But even they noticed very early on that they were being outgunned online—not least because CCHQ seemed to think that its paid-for ads on Facebook and YouTube videos would be able to compete with the torrent of rather edgier, savvier and far more share-worthy content and memes being produced by Labour, Momentum, and by their supporters on a do-it-yourself, 'organic' basis. Again, [Table 3.1](#) offers clear evidence that Labour's members were far more politically engaged with social media than their Tory counterparts during the campaign. Moreover, while Labour already enjoyed a head-start over its major party rival at the outset of the campaign, evidence suggests that it further benefited from a 61% increase in the numbers of their 'followers' on social media during the six weeks of the election campaign, compared with a six per cent rise for the Tories ([Morgan, 2017](#)). Thus, the digital reach of the Labour Party seems to have been significantly greater than that of the Conservatives.

3. Self-inflicted wounds

But problems with the operational, organizational and digital aspects of the Conservative campaign cannot disguise, and were not responsible for, its short-term tactical failures. One of the earliest (and least commented on in the so-called 'Mainstream Media', though not on Facebook and Twitter) was a commitment to a free vote in Parliament on the reintroduction of fox-hunting—an activity opposed by over three-quarters of the public. May's support for the idea (according to the many Conservative activists who detected it damaging their cause on the doorstep) badly undermined the attempt made by the party since she took over as Prime Minister in July 2016 to argue that she wasn't one of those 'same old Tories' ([Lowe, 2017](#)).

The pledge on fox hunting, however, was just one item among many in a largely uncosted and pessimistic Tory manifesto which might have been expressly designed to re-toxify rather than de-toxify the party ([Maltby, 2017](#)) and to put off rather than pull in voters. Special mention, however, should go to those policies impacting on the elderly—a group whose support the Tories could (and perhaps at this election did) take for granted. Believing they would win the election and therefore be back in government, and realising that they needed more room for manoeuvre on the fiscal front, the Conservatives refused to give an open-ended commitment to continuing the so-called 'Triple Lock' on pensions introduced by David Cameron and George Osborne or the winter-fuel payments brought in before 2010.

Even more damaging, however, at least according to both opinion polls and anecdotal evidence, was the proposal that the value of an individual's house (over and above £100,000) should be included in the calculation of assets used to determine their contribution to the bill for their social care—a suggestion swiftly and very effectively branded 'the dementia tax' by opponents and the media. This chorus of criticism precipitated a screeching U-turn by Mrs May, who then managed to make matters even worse for herself by insisting, to the incredulity of everyone watching, that 'nothing has changed'. Turning out to be 'weak and wobbly' rather than 'strong and stable' was bad enough; treating voters like idiots turned out to be calamitous.

4. Longer-term problems: austerity and insecurity

But it was as much about what was not in the manifesto as about what was in it that got the Tories into trouble. Irritation with May's tin-eared, 'magic money tree' riposte to the nurse who had asked her on live television about pay tapped into wider concern on the part of voters—including some who nevertheless went on to vote Conservative if post-election polling is anything to go by—that key public services (and the people who work in them) were coming under serious financial strain as the result of the austerity policies pursued by the government since 2010. Lived experience remains crucial to the way people vote, and no-one with school-aged children or anyone who had needed to use the NHS could have failed to notice that, however much ministers repeated the mantra that spending on both was at record levels, education and healthcare were running desperately short of resources. At least some of those voters would also have noticed that those same ministers, after years of telling the public that savings must be made in order to balance the books, had not only manifestly failed to achieve that goal but now seemed surprisingly relaxed about extending the timeframe to meet it in order to accommodate any negative economic effects brought about by Brexit—a historic change which, voters had been told during the referendum campaign, would mean an extra £350 million a week for the NHS. Nearly a year later, it was obvious that any such windfall would be a long time coming, if it ever came at all. It was also obvious by then that talk of Mrs May being a new kind of Conservative—talk which seemed to rest on little more than a couple of speeches penned for her by Nick Timothy before she entered Number Ten as Prime Minister—looked wide of the mark. There was certainly precious little sign in the Tory manifesto of much being done either directly or indirectly for the so-called 'Just About Managing', or the public services they relied on, and all this at a time when growth was slow and when even those fortunate enough to get a pay rise were increasingly finding that any gains made were quickly offset by prices driven up by the fall in sterling precipitated by the referendum result (see [Corlett et al.](#),

2017). After the election, some Tories wondered why their party hadn't talked more about the economy: they should have realised that there was a reason for that.

Perhaps if the Conservatives had been facing a Labour Party believing that it was on the verge of getting into government and therefore as desperate as it had been in 2015 to (i) prove that it was fiscally responsible and (ii) avoid giving any hostages to fortune, none of this would have proved quite so problematic. Unfortunately, however, Labour under Jeremy Corbyn had few expectations of winning the election and was anyway more ideologically inclined to oppose austerity. As a result, it was prepared to make a positive, optimistic and even idealistic (though some would say unrealistic) offer to the electorate involving an end to pay restraint in the public sector as well as big increases in spending on key services—all paid for by tax rises that would supposedly hit only big business and the rich. Corbyn was also confident enough, after a second terrorist attack during the campaign looked like it might hand an advantage to the Prime Minister, to counter the accusation that, as an apparent supporter of any number of paramilitary organizations around the world, he was 'soft-on-terrorism'. The Labour leader responded with a claim that she, as Home Secretary, had cut police numbers in order to save money and balance the books. The score-draw that resulted from the charge and counter-charge may have been unseemly—Corbyn supporters were particularly irritated by a Tory Facebook advertisement on the issue which achieved 6.6 million views—but the fact that the terrorism issue was not an easy victory for the Conservatives was in effect a win for Labour.

The intense media discussion of both the terrorist attacks and the parties' manifestos also dovetailed with a natural (and some would say entirely proper) desire on the part of journalists during elections, first, to avoid slavishly following the agenda set by politicians and, second, to discuss the policies being presented to the electorate. This proved problematic for a Conservative campaign that had hoped to keep the focus away from policy and instead on who would be best able to negotiate Brexit. As a result—and also as a result of Jeremy Corbyn's better-than-expected media performances and Labour's more-popular-than-expected manifesto—the Conservatives did not enjoy the kind of effortless superiority in broadcast and print coverage that they had anticipated (Deacon and Smith, 2017). Given the fact that they anticipated (quite rightly it turns out) no such superiority when it came to social media, which is clearly becoming an increasingly important part of the mix, this must have come as quite a blow (see Bond, 2017). The media, mainstream or social, doesn't have as big an impact on election outcomes as some imagine (see Newton, 2006) but it's always nice to have it firmly on one's side.

5. Winners and Losers

We need, however, not to get so carried away by the contrast between what many thought would happen to a Corbyn-led Labour Party and what actually happened (as well as between the smart campaign we expected from the Conservatives and the maladroit one they actually delivered) that we forget the fact that the Tories garnered their biggest share of the vote since 1983. Nor should we ignore their much improved performance in Scotland, where the popularity of Ruth Davidson, the Tory leader there, undoubtedly contributed to the party virtually doubling its share of the vote to 28.6% and boosting its share of Westminster seats from just one to 13. It is also worth noting that, according to a number of large-sample post-election polls (principally those conducted by Lord Ashcroft, YouGov and Ipsos MORI), the Conservatives made big gains in Great Britain as a whole among working-class voters, particularly in the private sector, registering gains of over ten percentage points among not just semi- and unskilled workers but also among the C2 voters fabled for swinging elections one way or another (see [Table 3.2](#)). Polling and constituency breakdowns suggest that a large part of that gain derived from Mrs May's much-trumpeted determination to 'take back control' of Britain's borders by ensuring that 'Brexit means Brexit'—hence the six seats gained from Labour in the wake of their recording big majorities for Leave in the 2016 referendum: Copeland, Derbyshire North East, Mansfield, Middlesboro South, Stoke South and Walsall North. More generally, the Conservatives recorded a higher share of the vote in 2017 than they had in 2015 in areas of the country that voted to leave in the referendum.

Those gains were very much of a piece with the strategy followed by Theresa May since becoming Prime Minister, namely to Hoover up voters who might otherwise have supported UKIP by offering them not just a hard Brexit and further action on immigration but also signature policies like a return to grammar schools. And, on the surface anyway, the strategy looked like a roaring success. UKIP, now without its iconic leader, Nigel Farage, dropped further and further down in the opinion polls and at the election fell from 12.6% of the vote in 2015 to just 1.8%. Analysis of post-election polling, however, suggests that a significant number of erstwhile UKIP supporters, reassured by a combination of Conservative rhetoric and Corbyn's promise to respect the result of the referendum, felt no obligation to vote Tory, especially when they and those around them probably had more to gain materially from Labour's left-wing pitch than they did from continued austerity under Mrs May and her colleagues. Meanwhile, analysis of constituency voting reveals, possibly rather surprisingly, that in those seats where UKIP decided not to stand a candidate (perhaps in order to give a Brexit-supporting Tory a clear run, perhaps simply to save money), Labour rather than the Conservatives tended to be the main beneficiary. As a

Table 3.2 The demographics of voting, 2017

	Conservative	Labour	Lib Dem	Turnout (registered voters)	Labour to Conservative Swing
All	44 (+6)	41 (+10)	8 (0)	69 (+3)	-2
Gender					
Male	44 (+6)	40 (+11)	7 (-1)	67 (+2)	-2.5
Female	43 (+6)	42 (+9)	8 (0)	69 (+3)	-1.5
Age					
18-24	27 (-1)	62 (+20)	5 (+1)	64 (+21)	-10.5
25-34	27 (-6)	56 (+20)	9 (+2)	64 (+10)	-13
35-44	33 (-2)	49 (+14)	10 (0)	63 (-1)	-8
45-54	43 (+7)	40 (+8)	7 (-1)	72 (0)	-0.5
55-64	51 (+14)	34 (+3)	7 (-2)	73 (-4)	+5.5
65+	61 (+14)	25 (+3)	7 (-1)	73 (-5)	+5.5
Social Class					
AB	47 (+2)	37 (+11)	10 (-2)	73 (-2)	-4.5
C1	44 (+2)	40 (+12)	7 (-1)	74 (+6)	-5
C2	45 (+13)	41 (+9)	6 (0)	66 (+4)	+2
DE	38 (+12)	47 (+6)	5 (0)	61 (+5)	+3
Housing Tenure					
Owned	55 (+9)	30 (+7)	7 (-2)	73 (-4)	+1
Mortgage	43 (+4)	40 (+8)	9 (0)	72 (+3)	-2
Social renter	26 (+8)	57 (+8)	4 (+1)	60 (+4)	0
Private renter	31 (+3)	54 (+15)	7 (+1)	65 (+14)	-6
Ethnic group					
White	45 (+6)	39 (+11)	8 (0)	69 (+1)	-2.5
All BME	19 (-4)	73 (+8)	6 (+2)	64 (-6)	-6
Education					
No qualifications	52	35	4	64	
Other qualifications	46	39	6	67	
Degree or higher	33	48	12	76	
EU Ref vote					
Remain	33	47	13	78	
Leave	46	39	7	69	
Did not vote	23	66	4	25	

Source: Adapted from 'How Britain Voted 2017', Ipsos MORI estimates, accessed at https://www.ipsos.com/ipsos-mori/en-uk/how-britain-voted-2017-election?language_content_entity=en-uk. All figures are percentages. Figures in brackets indicate change since 2015.

result, and because Labour often had reasonably-sized majorities anyway in many 'Leave' constituencies, the improvement in the Conservatives' vote share in those places was insufficient to deliver them anywhere near the number of seats they had been hoping for.

Moreover, the flip side of the Conservatives' efforts to attract working-class 'authoritarian' and anti-immigration/anti-European voters was the backlash they

seem to have suffered in constituencies which voted for Remain, many of them in urban areas containing high concentrations of (often younger) well-heeled, well-educated, AB (or, if they were students, future AB) voters and/or voters from ethnic minorities. As a result, many Labour MPs who thought earlier that they were facing almost certain defeat ended up with much bigger majorities (Rupa Huq in Ealing Central and Acton who won by just 274 votes in 2015 but by 13,807 in 2017 being perhaps the most striking example) while others who thought they had little chance of snatching their seats from Tory incumbents managed to do so—Emma Dent Coad in Kensington springs immediately to mind. Meanwhile, the return to the Commons of the former Liberal Democrat minister Vince Cable, in his old seat in Twickenham, at the expense of the Tory opponent who had defeated him in 2015 was almost certainly down, at least in part, to the Tories' failure to replicate their increased appeal among white working-class voters among their middle-class counterparts.

Every bit as importantly, the Conservatives' nationalistic and narrow-minded thrust did them no favours with younger voters either. And 'young' doesn't mean only those 18-24 year olds (many of them students) who were so taken by Jeremy Corbyn that they contributed to Tory defeats in university towns like previously true-blue Canterbury. It also included (see [Table 3.2](#)) 25-44 year olds, a fair proportion of whom were struggling to get on the housing ladder in an era of rising prices, stagnant wages and limited construction, and some of whom were getting letters home from their children's schools asking them to contribute toward basic costs or informing them of cuts to staffing.

The Tories suffered an especially sharp swing to Labour among voters living in the private rental sector, many of whom are increasingly despondent about the prospect of ever owning their own homes given the long-term crisis in housing that has been slowly fomenting across the country. Whether or not the news that, in the wake of the dementia tax, they might not even stand to inherit much from their parents came as the final straw, we may never know; but many of them were clearly unimpressed by a Conservative manifesto and leadership that appeared to offer not much more than Brexit and continuing austerity. Perhaps if Mrs May had been able to offset such losses by boosting turnout among retirees, who continued to vote Tory in much greater numbers, she might have triumphed. But, possibly due to her manifesto, the elderly voted less in 2015 than in 2017 (see [Table 3.2](#))—something that Lynton Crosby, speaking afterward, clearly considered significant ([Knaus, 2017](#)).

6. What is to be done?

This was an election at which everything that could go wrong for the Conservatives did go wrong. The manifesto, which May's (now former) Chief

of Staff Nick Timothy believed would be an asset, turned into a liability, confirming the belief of her campaign consultant Lynton Crosby that the contest between the parties needed to be framed in terms of leadership. Unfortunately, however, Theresa May simply wasn't the kind of presidential politician who could carry that kind of campaign. Nor did Brexit do her or her party as much of a favour as everyone had expected. For one thing, she seemed to think she could get away with mouthing mantras and platitudes about leaving the EU, opening up a vacuum that other issues rushed in to fill. For another, the number of UKIP, older, poorly-educated and working-class voters that the party gained as a result of the government's tough talk on Europe seems to have been outweighed by the number of younger, better-educated, middle-class, Remain voters who were alienated and infuriated by it—and by May's claim at her party conference that 'If you believe you are a citizen of the world, you are a citizen of nowhere' (Bush, 2017). More generally, the Tories suffered because they were unable or unwilling, ideologically or otherwise, to respond convincingly—or even, to be honest, at all—to increasing voter concern about ongoing cuts to key public services.

Clearly, the Tories need to re-think a number of things in terms of strategy and organisation—something former Party Chairman, Eric Pickles, has since reported back on *Conservative Party* (2017). How they do voter identification and whether they have over-centralised their operation should clearly be key concerns, as should how they can better exploit truly local intelligence effectively. It will not be easy because any review worth the name is bound to bring into focus the often fraught nature of the relationship between local associations and CCHQ (or Central Office, as it used to be known). Moreover, the Conservatives will have to do all this at the same time as managing a precarious parliamentary situation while charged with the greatest challenge to confront a government in living memory: the successful negotiation of the United Kingdom's exit from the European Union. And the task will be made all the harder by the fact that they are led by a Prime Minister who, in the wake of the election, has manifestly lost the confidence of the British people and many of her own followers and colleagues, despite having garnered an increased share of the vote across the country. The Conservative Party has a history of ruthlessly dispatching leaders once they are perceived to have become electoral liabilities, so Theresa May's time in Downing Street may be limited, even if, in the immediate aftermath of the election, there was little appetite in the party for replacing her, not least because there was no agreement on who might best replace her (Savage, 2017). Whoever eventually does so will be confronted with a huge political task if he or she is to construct a broad and winning electoral coalition better capable of turning votes in the country into seats in parliament.

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