European Elections monitor

# Outgoing Prime Minister David Cameron's Conservative Party confounds the polls and wins an absolute majority in the UK general elections.

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**Results**

There was massive surprise in the UK where general election results confounded all of the pre-electoral opinion polls. Indeed the latter predicted an extremely tight result between the two main parties – the Conservative Party led by outgoing Prime Minister David Cameron and the Labour Party led by Ed Miliband – ruling out a clear majority in Parliament, but the UK electorate approved the Tories who have been in office for the last five years. The Conservative Party won 36.9% of the vote and with 331 seats (+24 in comparison with the previous elections on 6th May 2010) and it took the absolute majority in the House of Commons, the lower Chamber of Parliament. It easily drew ahead of Labour which won 30.4% of the vote and 232 seats (- 26) i.e. their lowest score in 28 years.

The Liberal Democrats (LibDem), the Conservative Party's partners in the outgoing government, led by outgoing Deputy Prime Minister Nick Clegg suffered collapse: 7.9% of the vote and 8 seats (- 49).

The second winner in the election was the Scottish National Party (SNP), led by Nicola Sturgeon which easily asserted itself in Scotland, which to date, had been the historic bastion of the Labour Party – there it took 56 of the 59 seats available (+ 50 and 4.7% of the vote).

The populist, anti-European party, the UK Independence Party (UKIP) led by Nigel Farage won 12.6% of the vote but only won one seat (- 1 in comparison with the last parliament). Its leader was beaten in the constituency of South Thanet (Kent) where he was standing leading to his resignation as UKIP's leader the next day.

The Green Party of England and Wales led by Natalie Bennet won one seat only (=). In Wales Plaid Cymru led by Leanne Wood, won 3 seats (=) (0.6% of the vote).

In Northern Ireland, the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP), that wants Northern Ireland to remain within the UK, led by Peter Robinson won 8 seats (=); Sinn Fein, a nationalist party led by Dawn Doyle, 4 (- 1); the Social Democratic and Labour Party (SDLP, led by Alastair McDonnell, 3 (=) and the Ulster Unionist Party (UUP) led by Mike Nesbitt, 2.

In spite of the forecasts Britons expressed their satisfaction with the Conservatives, at the country's helm for the last five years. Moreover, since they are very much accustomed and also attached to their voting method (first pas the post) which provides the "big" parties with a massive advantage, they voted "tactically". Although the SNP deprived many Labour MPs of their seats in Scotland, Labour's losses there are not enough to explain its defeat. Labour suffered due to its lack of economic credibility whilst the economy was – according to the polls – the electorate's priority in this election. Ed Miliband admitted that this party "*had not made enough progress in England*". In fact the LibDem collapse benefited the Conservatives more than it did the opposition. Finally, as during the referendum for the independence of Scotland on 18th September last, voters preferred continuity to change.

One result of this election was that no less than three political leaders resigned the next day: Labour's Ed Miliband, LibDem, Nick Clegg and UKIP leader, Nigel Farage. The latter has not ruled out his return in the coming months however.

2/3 of Britons turned out to vote (66%) with the count being up by 0.9% in comparison with the previous election on 6th May 2010.

**General Elections Results on 7th may 2015 in the UK**

Turnout : 66%

| Political Parties | No of votes won | % of votes cast | No of seats |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Conservative Party (Conservative)** | 11 334 920 | 36.90 | 331 |
| **Labour Party (Labour)** | 9 344 328 | 30.40 | 232 |
| **UK Independence Party (UKIP)** | 3 881 129 | 12.60 | 1 |
| **Liberal Democrats (LibDem)** | 2 415 888 | 7.90 | 8 |
| **Scottish National Party (SNP)** | 1 454 436 | 4.70 | 56 |
| **Green Party of England and Wales (G)** | 1 154 562 | 3.80 | 1 |
| **Democratic Unionist Party (DUP)** | 184 260 | 0.60 | 8 |
| **Plaid Cymru-Party of Wales (PC)** | 181 694 | 0.60 | 3 |
| **Sinn Fein (SF)** | 176 232 | 0.60 | 4 |
| **Ulster Unionist Party (UUP)** | 114 935 | 0.40 | 2 |
| **Social Democratic and Labour Party (SDLP)** | 99 809 | 0.30 | 3 |
| **Others** | 349 487 | 1.10 | 1 |

Source : http://www.bbc.com/news/election/2015/results

The UK electorate therefore approved outgoing Prime Minister David Cameron's work. The latter has indeed been able to boast an unquestionable economic performance: return of growth, at its highest since 2007 (2.6% in 2014 and 3.5% forecast in 2015) and a reduction in unemployment, at its lowest level since June 2008 (5.5% in January 2015). The Conservatives have created two million new jobs since 2010. The government coalition between the Conservatives and the Liberal Democrats was able to undertake most of its reforms at the beginning of its mandate, before easing off on austerity as of 2013 as it balanced the reduction of its deficits and maintained growth, which ultimately led to economic recovery. Although growth has been recovered it masks a rise in inequality but the population did however express its confidence in continuing along a path that is now mapped out for the next five years.

This is a major defeat for Labour. "*Scottish nationalism has submerged us*," declared Ed Miliband. The Scottish vote, which has mainly not forgiven Labour for taking part in the "no" campaign alongside the Tories in the referendum on independence on 18th September last is not the only reason behind the Labour defeat. The opposition party's main project which took the campaign much further to the left was, due to a lack of room to manoeuvre, quite close to that defended by the Conservatives. Undoubtedly Labour promised more social equality than the Tories, notably via greater taxation of the wealthiest and softer social cuts, to be spread out over a greater period, it did not put an alternative project forward – and so in the end it was only disputing the method to be used with the Tories.
Moreover Ed Miliband, who is considered not very charismatic, was also seen as less credible from an economic point of view than his main rival.

Hence the SNP took its "revenge" over the independence referendum. On 7th May it became the 3rd political party in the House of Commons taking advantage of its geographical concentration, which meant that it did not suffer from this type of election.
"*The Scottish lion has roared across the country*" said Alex Salmond, the former Scottish leader (2007-2014). Symbolic of these elections was Mhairi Black, a 20 year-old student who became the youngest British MP in 350 years, as she beat outgoing MP, former Secretary of State (2005-2011) Douglas Alexander.
In addition to this if a majority of Britons voted in support

of a Brexit (the UK's exit of the European Union), David Cameron would probably be forced to organise a further referendum on Scottish independence since the Scots are mainly pro-European. Nicola Sturgeon has already made this request. In the speech delivered after speaking with Queen Elizabeth II on 8th May David Cameron promised to govern "*to unite the country, one nation, the United Kingdom*" and said that he would continue devolution in Scotland and Wales,"*notably by implementing as promised the delegation of power as quickly as possible.*" "*In Scotland we intend to create the most decentralised government in the world providing it with major powers from a fiscal point of view*," he indicated.
"*Whether we consider the SNP or UKIP we are witnessing a national identity withdrawal in terms of external threats even though the two parties have very different ideas about the Nation State,*" declared Agnès Alexandre-Collier, professor of British Civilisation at the Université de Bourgogne.

The LibDems suffered severe defeat and paid for their participation in the outgoing government. "*This means total collapse for the LibDems*," analyses Patrick Dunleavy, a political expert at the London School of Economics (LSE). Although its leader Nick Clegg retained his seat in the constituency of Sheffield Hallam, Vince Cable, outgoing Minister for Trade, Danny Alexander, outgoing Minister of the Treasury and Ed Davey, outgoing Minister for Energy all lost theirs.

Aged 47 and originally from London David Cameron is a pure product of the upper classes. Educated at Eton, one of the most reputed schools in the UK (and the world) he is also a graduate of the Oxford University. Political advisor to Margaret Thatcher at the start of his career he became advisor to the Treasury and then to the Home Office within John Major's government. In 1994 he left his government position to join Carlton Communications. Beaten in the 1997 elections he was elected to the House of Commons for the first time in 2001 in the constituency of Witney (Oxfordshire). Appointed deputy leader of the Conservative Party in 2003 he then became its leader on 6th December 2005 with 67.6% of the vote beating David Davis (32.3%). He led the Conservative Party to victory in the general elections on 6th May 2010 but because he did not have a clear majority he had to form a coalition government with the Liberal-Democrats.

Following the Conservative victory Europe is now the focus of political debate. In 2013 David Cameron promised to organise a referendum on the exit of his country from the European Union by 2017 if he was re-elected. With his absolute majority the latter will now be organised. "*It is time to organise this referendum. It is not only in the interest of the UK but also in that of all of Europe*," indicated the Mayor of London Boris Johnson, elected MP in the constituency of Uxbridge.

David Cameron's victory might make his relations slightly difficult with his European partners with whom he is trying to negotiate a reform of the way the European Union is run. President of the European Commission Jean-Claude Juncker recently said that he did not rule out modifying some treaties slightly. Investors and the financial markets that were happy with the Conservative victory have already expressed their fears about the damaging effects that a referendum on the country's future in the European Union would have on the economy.

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