



Maitland/AMO Guide to Election Night

Voters in 650 constituencies are going to polls between 7am and 10pm today, while many others have already voted by post. The winning line for an overall majority is 326 seats.

In 2017 under Theresa May's leadership the Conservatives won 317 seats, requiring them to seek a "confidence and supply" agreement with the DUP. However, this time the Conservatives have few potential partners for such an agreement, meaning that even narrowly falling short could put their ability to "Get Brexit Done" and possibly even Mr Johnson's premiership in peril.

The stakes could not be higher, so what can we expect from election night?

10 pm

The exit poll jointly commissioned by the BBC, ITV and Sky News is published as soon the polls close. In recent elections the exit poll has been remarkably accurate, to within just a handful of seats. This poll is more accurate than an opinion poll as the results are based on interviews outside 144 polling stations with people who have just cast their vote. However, occasionally the exit poll can get it wrong, for example in 1992 wrongly predicting a hung parliament rather than a Conservative majority.

In the absence of any hard results in the first hour, expect to hear speculation on whether the exit poll is accurate (the truth is at this stage no-one will know), alongside pictures of people running into counting centres with ballot boxes.

11 pm

One of the features of UK elections is the race to be the first constituency to declare its result. In recent elections (and in the referendum) this was a close race between Sunderland and Newcastle. Returning officers for both Houghton and Sunderland South and Newcastle upon Tyne Central believe they can declare their results by 11pm. These seats will almost certainly be held by Labour, but everyone will be looking at the swing from Labour to the Conservatives as an indicator of how the parties are likely to do in traditionally Labour areas. This will also be the first indication of turnout across the country.

Midnight

At this stage the results will be trickling in fairly slowly and we may only have a handful of declarations, mainly in Labour urban areas. However, analysts will start to number-crunch these few results and combine it with the exit poll to update the national projections used by the broadcasters. This will continue through the night and we should expect to hear greater levels of confidence about these projections once results start to come in from across the country.

1 am

After a relatively quiet start to election night, we should get the first results from a number of marginal seats in this hour.

One to watch is Labour-held Workington, which attracted media attention after centre-right think tank Onward identified “Workington man” as the type of voter the Conservatives need to win over. The Conservative Party needs a 5% swing to win this seat in the North West of England. If they achieve this, the Conservatives will be confident of securing an overall majority, but if they fail to do so it may be some while before we can predict the final result.

An easier target for the Conservatives is Darlington, which has been Labour since 1992, but returned a Conservative MP during the Thatcher era.

The first Scottish seat to declare is expected to be Rutherglen & Hamilton West which was won narrowly by Labour in 2017. The SNP in second place and just 265 votes behind Labour, will hope to win it back, starting off what they hope will be a good night for the SNP in Scotland.

2 am

At this stage of the night we will probably have fewer than 50 out of 650 seats declared, but a fairly clear picture should be starting to emerge. Party strategists will be getting feedback from counting centres around the country long before results are declared and unless things are very close, they will have a good sense of where things are going to end up. In the next hour the pace of declarations speeds up noticeably, with a couple of results coming in every minute.

Commentators and strategists will be looking at Labour held marginals in the Midlands and the North West such as Wolverhampton North East and Bury North to determine the extent of the Conservative advance in these key battleground seats.

We get our first results in London and will be able to see whether there is a different dynamic in the capital. Two seats that have swung between the major parties in recent elections are expected to declare around now: Labour-held Battersea and Tory-held Putney.

We should also get our first results in Wales, with Wrexham being one to watch. Labour has a new candidate in Mary Wimbury, but she is defending a majority of less than 2,000. This is a seat the Conservatives will be hoping to win.

We will also be looking out for West Bromwich East, the seat represented by Labour deputy leader Tom Watson before his shock announcement that he would not stand for re-election. Winning here is something of a long shot for the Conservatives and would be a sign that they are heading for a big majority nationally.

Hartlepool has been Labour since its creation and should remain in its hands. It is however the top target for the Brexit Party, which is standing its chairman Richard Tice as the candidate.

The result in Birkenhead in the North West, where veteran former Labour MP Frank Field is standing for the first time as an independent, will also come around 2 am.

3 am

This is now the busiest time of the night and broadcasters will be trying to keep pace with results flooding in, while looking out for key seats and possible upsets.

The result in the South East seat of Esher and Walton, held by Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab, is expected around this time. The Liberal Democrats say they have a good chance of unseating him, but they will need to overcome a majority of more than 23,000 in this safest of Conservative seat.

Another prominent Brexiteer, former Conservative leader Iain Duncan Smith, is defending a slim majority of 2,500 over Labour in Chingford and Woodford Green and will find out his result in this hour.

Around the same time, Liberal Democrat Leader Jo Swinson will discover her fate in Dunbartonshire East. She lost her seat to the SNP in the 2015 election but won it back in 2017 with a majority of more than 5,000. The interesting thing is that both Labour and the Conservatives have enough supporters in this seat to make a difference if they chose to vote tactically. But would they use their vote to save Ms Swinson from the pro-independence SNP or use the opportunity to defeat her?

The result in Jeremy Corbyn's Islington North seat is expected to declare at about the same time, but this is the safest of territory for Labour. The interesting thing will be what he decides to say in his speech. By now we are likely to have a real sense of how the election is panning out and results in Labour heartland seats such as Don Valley, Great Grimsby and even Sedgefield, formerly represented by Tony Blair, will go some way to determining the outcome. Has Labour's "Red Wall" held firm or have the Conservatives managed to cut a swathe through these seats?

Conservative fortunes will not only be determined by those seats they hope to gain, but by those they are defending. Around now we should get results from some key seats in Scotland that the Conservatives won from the SNP in 2017 and will hope to hold such as East Renfrewshire and Ochil & Perthshire South.

In Northern Ireland, the DUP's Westminster leader Nigel Dodds will find out his result in Belfast North. The SDLP have stood aside to try and help the Sinn Féin candidate get over the line.

We will also start to see the results from seats where former Conservative MPs are standing as independent, having had the whip withdrawn. They all face uphill struggles, but the best chance of winning probably falls to Dominic Grieve in Beaconsfield, where the Liberal Democrats have decided not to stand.

The Cities of London and Westminster seat is being contested by former Labour MP Chuka Umunna, who switched to the Liberal Democrats earlier this year. It will be a tall order for

him to defeat the Conservative leader of Westminster council Nickie Aiken though, as the Lib Dems finished third here last time.

4 am

There are still some significant results to come, particularly in London which tends to count more slowly than much of the rest of the country.

The most important result will be in Uxbridge & South Ruislip where Boris Johnson is defending a majority of 5,000. He has been targeted by Labour, but it would be a real shock if he was to lose this seat.

An interesting and unpredictable contest has taken place in Kensington, which was won by Emma Dent Coad in a shock result in 2017. She has a majority of only 20 votes over the Conservatives but also faces the challenge of the Liberal Democrats, who are represented by former Conservative Sam Gyimah.

Results will continue to come in from lots of the marginals including Canterbury in the South East, Ipswich in the East of England and Wakefield in the North West. If it is still close, Boris Johnson will need to pick up seats like these to achieve a majority in the Commons.

Mr Johnson will also need to hold on to seats where the Conservative majority is just a few hundred such as Stirling in Scotland, Preseli Pembrokeshire in Wales and Hastings & Rye on the South coast, represented until this election by Amber Rudd.

5am

By now it might only be the diehard politicians who are still watching the results, but they may be rewarded with some interesting ones.

A close contest is expected in Finchley & Golders Green, with its large Jewish community, where Conservative MP Mike Freer will be hoping to hold off the challenge from Luciana Berger, the Liberal Democrat candidate who left the Labour Party after facing anti-Semitism.

Meanwhile in neighbouring Chipping Barnet, Labour will be hoping to defeat Environment Secretary Theresa Villiers who is defending a wafer thin 353 majority and to win Southampton Itchen where the Conservative majority is only 31.

In Bolsover the Conservatives will be hoping to defeat Dennis Skinner in a seat that has only ever returned a Labour MP since its creation in 1950. A much more straightforward target for the Conservatives the East Midlands seat of Ashfield, where Labour has a majority of just 441 and MP Gloria de Piero has decided not to stand again.

6am

As the country awakes, the national result should be clear, but there will still be some final seats yet to declare, together with any outstanding recounts.

The sole Green MP, Caroline Lucas is likely to be returned in Brighton Pavilion. While in Richmond Park, the former Liberal Democrat MP for the area Sarah Olney looks likely to unseat Zac Goldsmith whose majority is just 45.

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The final results will come in from Cornwall where the Liberal Democrats will hope to win back seats like St Ives which it held in the coalition years, before being wiped out in the region by the Conservatives in 2015.

If there is a clear result either Boris Johnson or Jeremy Corbyn will head to the Palace for an audience with Her Majesty later in the day. But if it is a hung parliament, it may be some days before we know definitively what comes next.

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For further advice and support or if you have any questions, please contact Razi Rahman, Partner and Head of Political at Maitland/AMO, on rrahman@maitland.co.uk