

# Theresa May loses another Brexit vote - is it time she just gave up?

By [Chris Stafford](#)

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With just over two weeks to go until Brexit, Theresa May has once again failed to get her Brexit deal through parliament, leaving complete uncertainty about where the nation goes next. May lost the vote on her deal 391 to 242, a slightly higher level of support than in January but still a resounding defeat for a prime minister who increasingly appears to have lost control.



Hands up if you've had enough of all this. EPA

Following the defeat, the prime minister confirmed that MPs will now be able to vote on whether to oppose a no-deal Brexit. But she warned that the government would press ahead with planning for a no deal and that MPs would have to acknowledge that their vote does not change EU or UK law. If they fail to make a decision on what to do, no deal remains the default on March 29.

May said this will be a free vote, meaning she will not whip her party into voting to support her. In announcing this, she noted that “just like the referendum there are strongly held and equally legitimate views on both sides”, suggesting that this is another attempt to keep her fragile party together and prevent any more resignations, at least in the short term.

There will then be a vote on March 14 on whether to extend the Brexit process beyond March 29. But in another warning, May said “this does not solve the problems we face”. If MPs vote to extend, she said, the EU will want to know what they intend to do with that time. Do they want to revoke Article 50 entirely? Do they want to hold a second referendum? At the latter question, a large number of MPs cheered – while others shouted “no!”.

May added that she also believes there is still a majority for a deal. No one can doubt her tenacity and staying power. While [other ministers](#) have been scrambling to save their own careers and distance themselves from the ongoing mess, the prime minister has been nothing but persistent. Once again, pressure has been [mounting](#) on her to resign and although it is doubtful that such an action would really solve anything, after her Brexit deal was once again rejected by parliament, even May must be asking herself whether it is worth staying on.

## Time to go?

May's run as prime minister cannot go into the history books as anything other than a failure. To be fair, her inheritance from David Cameron was pretty lousy – a divided party tasked with delivering a major political action that had [barely been planned for at all](#). But the difficulty of this task was compounded by weak leadership, a lack of party discipline and numerous bad decisions. Her latest was to try to sell a minor concession from the EU as a last minute victory to try and convince MPs to support her deal. Once again, they weren't buying what she was selling.

Backbench MPs continue to stir up [trouble](#) from the sidelines, refusing to follow the party line and facing minimal repercussions for their disloyalty. May's loss on this latest vote came after the European Research Group of backbenchers held a meeting in their so-called "[star chamber](#)", agreeing to rebel en masse and further suggesting that May has lost control of her party.

The fact that May has managed to make her time as PM last nearly three years with all of this going on is pretty impressive. And there are no clear mechanisms to force her to step down if she decides not to. She has shown she can weather votes of no confidence and she is safe from another party leadership challenge until the end of the year. But following this latest rejection of her Brexit deal, it is hard to see what she can do next or why she would even want to go to all the effort.

Many suspect that May will simply get parliament to vote again, hoping that enough MPs will flinch at the last minute and vote for it to avoid a no deal Brexit. But while not as large as her first defeat, this loss was significant. And with her rivals once again [sensing blood in the water](#), many people probably wouldn't hold it against her if she just decided to abandon ship like so many [before her](#) and get a head start on the [lucrative](#) lecturing circuit that has served some of her predecessors so well.

## Now what?

We know that the majority of MPs [don't want a no deal](#), but in voting against May's deal they have made that much more likely. A vote in parliament against a no deal Brexit has no direct effect on the EU and Jean-Claude Juncker has already [warned](#) that there will be no third negotiation. It would be foolish to assume that this is not sincere. That all just makes a no deal more, not less, likely.

Taking this into account, it therefore isn't clear if extending Article 50 will achieve much more than delaying the inevitable. Despite constant assurances from prominent Leavers that the EU will see sense at the [last minute](#) and give Britain what it wants, the remarkable outward unity of the EU has not wavered in the nearly three years since the referendum.

The fact is that the EU isn't prepared to give into unrealistic demands from the UK to the detriment of itself. Given that the EU hasn't seen fit to [amend the terms](#) of the deal by now, it is hard to see that this will change. The EU will likely grant an extension because it won't want to be seen as forcing a no deal situation, but the fact that an extension into May would likely see Britain having to [participate](#) in the next European parliament elections raises issues for both sides.

Regardless of how well you think she has done in the job, there is little doubting that May has done more or less all she can as prime minister. Delivering Brexit was never going to be an easy task and it has proved all consuming. With other policies

failing as a result and her party even more divided, it may now be time for her to retire from Number 10 and let her critics in the party make good on their claims that they could do it better.

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