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BREXIT QUICKTAKE: SEVEN SCENARIOS

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Ready to rumble: Later today in the UK House of Commons a ‘rebel alliance’ of moderate Tories and opposition members of parliament (MPs) will try to begin a process to force UK Prime Minister (PM) Boris Johnson to seek a further Brexit delay until 31 January unless he negotiates a new Brexit deal with the EU or parliament votes in favour of a no-deal hard Brexit by 19 October. That deadline would follow the EU Council on 17-18 October. Johnson has said that he expects to have a new Brexit deal by then.

Tug of war: To succeed, the rebels would need to 1) seize control of the House of Commons agenda before 2) passing a law in both chambers of parliament. This will not be easy. Johnson has reportedly threatened to call an election for 14 October if MPs take control of the parliamentary agenda later today. But the PM cannot simply ‘call’ an election. He must get 2/3 support in the House of Commons for that. Moderates could organise themselves to reject a snap election unless Johnson has asked for a Brexit extension first. Parliament could also vote against the government with a simple majority in a confidence vote. That would give the rebels 14 days before a new election would be triggered to form a working majority for a new prime minister who could seek a further Brexit delay.

Parliament can block a hard Brexit in two ways: change the law or change the government. As rebel MPs could try both options, the days ahead will be very noisy indeed. With so many moving parts, it is impossible to say exactly how things will play out. We see seven stylised scenarios which we rank in terms of likelihood:

1. Rebel MPs change the current Brexit law in order to block a hard Brexit; Johnson reacts by going for a snap election on 14 October. MPs refuse new elections unless the Brexit deadline is extended or they refuse new elections but hold a vote of no confidence to topple Johnson instead. They organise themselves into a temporary working majority and ask for a delay, schedule a new referendum and/or new elections. **Fairly likely**
2. Rebel MPs fail to change the law – perhaps due to time constraints - but manage to bring down Johnson in a confidence vote before parliament shuts down for conference season c12 September. They organise themselves into a temporary working majority and ask the EU for a delay, schedule a new referendum and/or new elections. In new elections, the Brexiteers may still prevail if Johnson and Nigel Farage from the Brexit party form a grand coalition for a hard Brexit against a more fragmented opposition. **Somewhat likely**
3. Rebel MPs do not manage to block a hard Brexit before parliament shuts down on c12 September. Johnson would likely play on without a general election before 31 October. However, Johnson would probably call election shortly after 31 October to try and secure a larger majority. **Somewhat likely**.



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4. Rebel MPs change the law to block a hard Brexit; Johnson still manages to strike a new deal with the EU at the 17-18 October EU Council – parliament backs it. **Best case scenario – somewhat unlikely**
5. Rebel MPs change the law to block a hard Brexit but Johnson counters with a general election before Brexit day - which Labour goes for. [Advantage Brexiteers](#): 1) Johnson and Farage could agree to join forces; 2) moderate pro-EU voters would be reluctant to back far-left Corbyn and Labour. **Unlikely**
6. Rebel MPs fail to change the law but vote against Johnson in a confidence vote. This scenario begins the same as No.2. However, the rebels fail to agree a new working majority and elections are triggered (probably for after 31 October). In this case, the risk of a hard Brexit by accident would be serious. Johnson could call a general election for early November to ensure that parliament is closed during October – that would make it hard for MPs to block a hard Brexit. In snap elections, Johnson would be the favourite to win. **Unlikely**
7. Rebel MPs change the law to force Johnson to ask for a further extension; he reluctantly obliges in the end after unsuccessfully trying all tricks at his disposal to ignore the law. It could get very messy indeed. **Highly unlikely**

The days ahead will be crucial. For now, we keep the hard Brexit risk at 40% but see the risks tilted strongly to the upside.

Further reading

[UK: Snap elections – what if?](#)

[UK politics – the big week ahead](#)

[The big Brexit mess: economic scenarios](#)

[Brexit: Boris vs parliament](#)

[Brexit and the EU: progress or blame game?](#)

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