

May's Manifesto - The Ins and Outs

Blog post by Practice Lead Kirsty Allan, 25 April 2017

With the UK now set for a general election on 8 June, attention has turned to the party manifestos. Given the general expectation that the Conservatives will win a large new majority, their platform is of particular interest. With very little constraining political opposition, UK Prime Minister Theresa May has the freedom to be as innovative as her admittedly cautious nature allows. The election is a chance to formalise her own, post-David Cameron agenda: a manifesto version of what she has already done with her cabinet. What she says on Europe and Brexit will be picked through minutely. So, what should we look for from a May manifesto?

The first is what she judges she can safely ditch. There are few easy choices here. She may be keen to drop the pledge not to raise personal tax, which helped produce an embarrassing U-turn on National Insurance Contributions for the self-employed after the March Budget and is a millstone for any shift of focus on tax. Shedding this Cameron-era promise would allow May to initiate the progressive tax reforms she sought in the recent budget, and raise tax revenue, but the move is already meeting with opposition in the mainstream press. Unpopular plans to impose larger probate fees in a so called "Death Tax" - disliked by older voters - have already been dropped.

May has pledged to keep the 0.7% overseas aid commitment but it would not be a great surprise if there was a further review of how and where the money is spent. The triple lock on pensions, a guarantee to increase the state pension every year by the higher of inflation, average earnings or a minimum of 2.5%, has proved popular with the core Conservative retiree voter base, which makes it difficult to repeal. But it is costly and May is likely to want to amend it.

The second is what she uses to put her own mark on policy direction. May has supported a reintroduction of grammar schools, much to some in her own party's dismay. But it is still likely to feature prominently in the manifesto. With a policy worthy of the 2015 Labour party, May is already floating a promise to cap energy prices which should appear as a manifesto pledge. Policy on corporate governance is likely to feature a push for remuneration committees. On health, there is now a political imperative for a plan to sustainably fund social care and a commitment on finally implementing the Dilnot Review in this area can be expected, although questions remain on how it will be paid for.

And, of course, this will be an election centred around Brexit. May is using this election as a means to sure up her domestic mandate for Brexit and the manifesto can be expected to codify her Lancaster House speech by bringing in a "Brexit Triple Lock", promising to end freedom of movement, UK participation in the Single Market and removing the UK from the jurisdiction of the European Court of Justice. [How much more certainty on Brexit](#) she will be prepared to commit to in the manifesto is as of yet unclear. But for the politician who said that 'Brexit means Brexit' it is nevertheless an opportunity to define what Brexit means for the Prime Minister whose tenure will be defined by it.