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# “A manifesto in primary colours”

## Yougov’s Marcus Roberts explains the sudden jump in poll ratings for Jeremy Corbyn’s Labour Party ahead of the UK election on 8 June

**Contrary to expectations, Labour’s poll ratings have increased significantly during their election campaign. The gap between them and the Tories has narrowed. Why?**

Theresa May called this election because she saw a 24 point poll lead, a divided Labour Party and an opportunity for a landslide victory. But the gap has narrowed dramatically. Whilst the Conservatives started the campaign in roughly the mid-40's in percentage terms, and Labour in roughly the mid 20's, Labour has grown its potential share of the vote to the mid to high 30's.

So the story here is the surprising growth in polling popularity for Jeremy Corbyn's Labour Party. The reasons for this appear to be a combination of pro-Labour and anti-Conservative factors. Firstly, Labour appears to be winning support among Greens, Liberal Democrats and young people. Secondly, Labour appears to be enjoying renewed support from its traditional base, with these voters choosing to return to the Labour Party, having flirted with the idea of going Conservative this time or just staying at home.

The likely source of this Labour rallying effect, which could account for up to half the gains Labour has made since the campaign began, is the surprisingly hardline politics Theresa May has adopted during the campaign. With her emphasis on a hard Brexit, new taxes to fund social care and a return to iconic traditional Conservative priorities like legalising fox hunting again in the English countryside, May appears to have repelled her Labour switchers, pushing them back into the arms of Jeremy Corbyn.

**Which of Corbyn’s policies are chiming well with voters?**

Jeremy Corbyn painted a manifesto in bright primary colours. Pollsters like me were not surprised that radical left-wing policies like renationalising railways, buses and the post office were popular with

voters. But we were surprised that this time they actually seem be affecting voters' decision making. Usually the policy aspect of campaigns takes a back seat to leadership ratings and trust in which party can handle the big issue of the day, in this case Brexit. On both those counts, May's Conservatives have a strong lead. But Jeremy Corbyn, through a combination of clarity and authenticity, has managed to connect with a larger pool of leftish, often young voters with his radical policy platform.

**Centre-left parties across Europe have polled atrociously in recent elections. Can they learn from Corbyn's tactics?**

I'd strongly urge waiting to see the election result before coming to conclusions! After all, Corbyn's electoral coalition is fragile (it is made up of many low turnout, low loyalty voters) versus May's likely solid voter base (high turnout, high loyalty electoral coalition). May's supporters are older and quieter. They're less likely to protest, tweet or shout on Facebook but more likely to actually vote.

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Still, a clear lesson would be the need for left-wing parties to abandon the technocracy of the 2000's and embrace bolder, stronger, clearer politics. By taking risks Corbyn has energised left-wing voters. If such an approach was taken with a politics that appealed to mainstream voters too, the left could actually even start winning again!

**To what extent is Labour's strong showing the result of mistakes the Tories are making?**

As I mentioned before, around half of Labour's poll surge seems to be driven by a retoxification of the Conservative brand, as a result of the choices Mrs. May has made in this campaign. In particular, her vision of a hardline Brexit (withdrawal from the Single Market so as to control Britain's borders again) does appeal to many Labour voters outside of urban areas who supported the Leave campaign in the Brexit referendum, but it enrages metropolitan voters and young people.

*As Brexit, Trump and Macron have all demonstrated, being the anti-politics politician is a powerful place to be these days.*

That said, May's Brexit politics may still work to her advantage. Strategically, hard Brexit may still prove to be a smart political choice by Mrs. May, as more marginal constituencies are likely to be decided by Eurosceptic older voters than by Europhile younger voters. So this may be a case of a political choice that leads to more votes

for Labour in existing Labour strongholds (London, Manchester etc.) but more votes for the Conservatives in crucial marginal constituencies in the North.

**If the polls are correct, what does this mean for the future of Corbyn as Labour leader?**

"If the polls are correct" is a big "if"! Some pollsters like ICM say young voter turnout will be very low and so the Corbyn surge will collapse, others like my own YouGov say that young person turnout will be merely low, ensuring a closer election than expected.

Regardless, the apparent popularity of Corbyn in this campaign (especially starting from such a low point) means he has dramatically strengthened his grip on the Labour leadership in the post-election period.

**How is Corbyn trying to attract young people and what does he need to do to get them to vote?**

As the Labour thinker Rowenna Davis has argued, Corbyn is appealing to the Left as a whole more successfully than Ed Miliband did two years ago. That is the essential nature of his success with young voters. Simply put, Miliband aimed to get some Greens, some left-wing Liberal Democrats, most traditional Labour voters and some socially conservative ex-Labour voters that had defected to UKIP and the Conservatives. But this wide coalition of voters resoundingly rejected him and Miliband won only the core of Labour voters.

In contrast, by unashamedly appealing only to the Greens, the Left and progressive Labour, Corbyn has solidified his hold on a smaller slice of the electorate than Miliband's ambition, but a larger slice than Miliband's reality.

He has done this through energising these voters with radical policies and by embodying an anti-establishment persona and politics so powerful that even his own parliamentary party has tried to dethrone him! That fact may even be playing to his advantage in this election, as it allows Corbyn to present himself as the anti-Westminster candidate, despite decades in politics. And as Brexit, Trump and Macron have all demonstrated, being the anti-politics politician is a powerful place to be these days.

*Interviewer: Michael Broening*

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