The coming Realignment?

The 2017 Election.
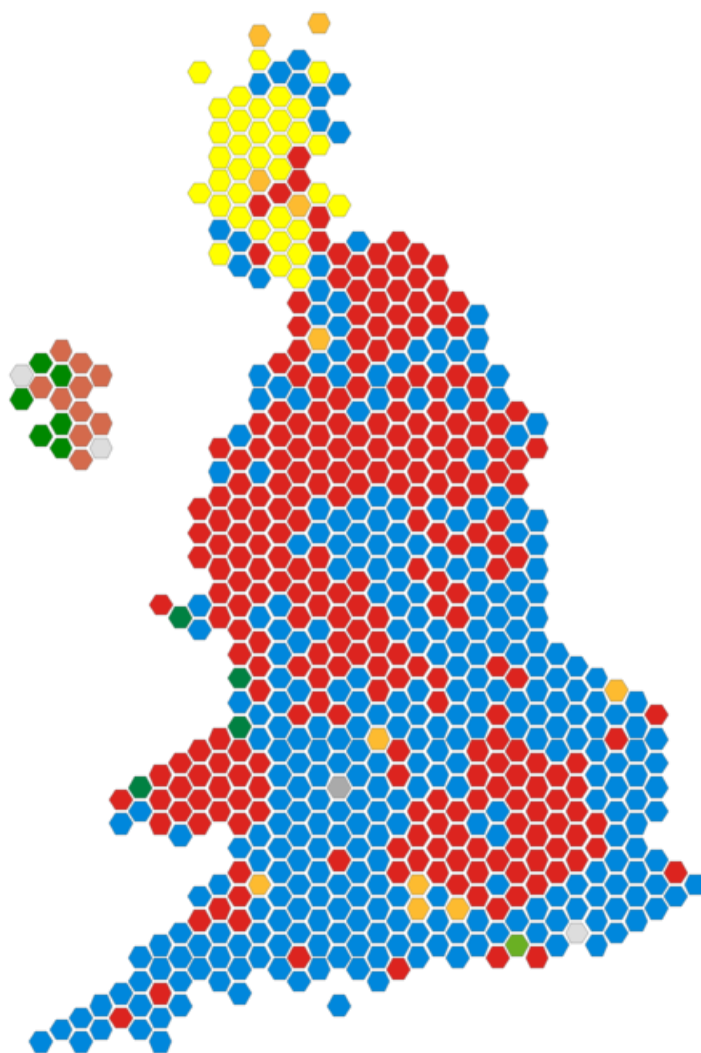
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Other Published Works:

Any use of data or ideas from the book is required to be referenced when applied to other work.

A selection of Other Works: Books:

Prentice, James. 2017. *Still Alone: Social Capital in the UK 2005-2015*. 1st ed. Hastings: Capture Politics.

Prentice, James. 2018. *Give Me Liberty!* 1st ed. Hastings: Capture Politics.

Prentice, James. 2019. *Trendification or Gentrification? A Coastal Case Study*. 1st ed. Hastings: Capture Politics.

Please note: not all the findings referenced could be placed within this book for reasons of limited space. Any statements not evidenced with a graph or a table can be found in other published works noted above and the capture politics website.

Also please note: that all statistics contained within this book come from the 2017 British Election Study (BES), Waves 11-13 datasets. Any other findings produced from other data sources will be outlined next to the relevant table and figure within the book.

Contents:

Introduction:

This book is designed to answer one particular question, why was large-scale electoral change able to occur in the 2017 General election and produce an unexpected hung parliament? This book uses Waves 11, 12 & 13 of the British Election Study (BES) to analyse the possible reasons behind why such a phenomenon could occur in the middle of an election. The book selects the dependent variable as the probability to vote for the Conservative or Labour Party. The independent variables follow theories identified by academics as potential reasons behind electoral outcomes in UK General Elections. These theories include Valence theory, which measures how voters focus on perceived performance when making their decisions (H. D. Clarke 2009). Other independent variables will focus on the Issue-Proximity theory, which attempts to gauge how close an individual voter's position is to a party's position. The narrower the gap between a voter and a given party should mean that in theory there will be a greater likelihood of a voter backing the given party (Downs 1957).

This book then analyses how the issues of the EU and immigration could have had an impact. These issues were high up the agenda compared to the issue of the economy, which traditionally has been high on the agenda (H. D. Clarke 2009). Consequently, this book isolates the issues of the EU/Brexit, Immigration and the economy/ public services and uses these independent variables to examine how significant these issues potentially were in directing votes during the 2017 election campaign. This book also isolates variables that measure identity, ideology and identification to examine the extent these factors had an impact in creating the hung parliament.

After each independent variable's effect has been examined this book will conclude by constructing a final model that will capture aspects of all these theories. The variables contained within the final model which are most significant will be understood to be the main factors that

caused the shock hung parliament result. This is how this book seeks to impartially determine the main causes of the 2017 election result.

This book will also explore how calling an election could have benefited Labour over the Conservatives by deeply analysing how voters were feeling at the time of the election being called. This book will also focus on how UK politics may have changed since the last election and understand if this in any way influenced how the election campaign could unfold going into the election.

The book finishes by analysing how people voted in constituencies, aiming to determine the reasons behind why certain constituencies changed parties. The book then analyses if this represents significant electoral change, more commonly referred to as a realignment. This book concludes by arguing that the 2017 General election ended in a hung parliament scenario mostly because there has been a significant change in the British electorate, which has started a wider process of realignment. This will go on to alter party competition, which later will cause a full-scale realignment within British politics. Therefore, the 2017 election only represents how electoral outcomes are gradually being shaped by an emerging realignment.

The Main interpretations: Competing explanations analysed in this book.

As soon as the polls closed and the exit poll was released, supporters of different political parties tried to persuade the public to their own interpretation of the election result, but are these interpretations accurate? What can the results from parliamentary seats tell us? What does the final result of this election mean for the state of public opinion and British politics? This study suggests that the following interpretations have been made.

1. The Labour Party managed to stop total defeat and produce a decent result for them through enthusing young people, increasing turnout and mobilising their supporters on Election Day. This was the theory the Labour Party promoted throughout the election night, particularly those who had been loyal to Corbyn.

2. The Conservative Party campaign was not well-led and was seen as opportunistic. This, matched with poor policy advice and a populist pro-Brexit "pork-barrel" politics from Labour is what cost the Conservative Party its majority. Labour's populist policies, tuition fees, in particular, is argued to be behind the Conservative Party's downfall. This was a theory promoted by some Conservative politicians on election night, particularly those most associated with a strong pro-Brexit message.

3. A realignment in British politics has occurred since the last general election, causing rapid increases in both Conservative and Labour support that have derived from the third parties' collapse forcing some voters to change their preferences. De-aligned Remain voters merged around Labour due to their more culturally liberal values, alternatively, de-aligned individuals who felt culturally conservative flocked to the Conservatives in support of Brexit and reaction against migration changes. This is known as realignment theory, of which will be mentioned throughout this book.

4. Brexit caused people to change their preferences as the election gave people an opportunity to vote in a way that would push for the type of Brexit they wanted. Remainers voted for Labour to avoid their feared "hard Brexit," hoping Labour would get enough seats to keep Britain in the single market. Leavers voted Conservative as they wanted the Brexit result to be implemented and prevent the UK from keeping many ties to Europe. Brexit cost the Conservative Party their majority, especially as Labour developed a vague pro-Brexit, as this allowed Labour to keep their leave base whilst also securing a large Remain base.

Therefore, the Conservative Party's hard Brexit position was punished and Labour's vague position was rewarded. This is known as the Brexit theory and was discussed greatly by commentators presenting the election night result show, and then later within media circles.

5. Labour improved upon its anticipated result due to a better than expected, and popular, moderate manifesto. Alongside this, a perception of improved performance by Labour's leader, Jeremy Corbyn, helped increase Labour's popular appeal. Moreover, a decline in assessments of Conservative leadership helped produce a hung parliament. This would be the Valence theory explanation and would be a mainstream theory promoted by many academic researchers, as this theory is thought to be most able to explain short-term rapid shifts in electoral support (H. Clarke et al. 2011).

Hypotheses for the Book

1. If the view that Labour's ability to enthuse young people on Election Day gave them their gains is accurate we expect to see:

Hypothesis 1.1) larger increases in turnout within seats Labour gained than compared to the national trend.

Hypothesis 1.2: There will not be large increases in turnout for the Conservative Party in seats they held or gained as these increases primarily should be in Labour gain areas.

Hypothesis 1.3: We would expect to see larger increases in majorities within once marginal seats than compared to constituencies thought to be "safe" for Labour.

Hypothesis 1.4: Larger increases in turnout and majorities for Labour will occur in seats that are known to have greater student populations, and as a result much younger than average populations.

2. If populism helped secure a surprise Labour comeback then we would expect to see large support for left-wing policies, along with sentiments that the country needed to be radically changed. These opinions would also need to be statistically significant in increasing the Labour vote at the expense of the Conservative Party vote in models generated.

3. If the view that this election showed a realignment in British Politics is correct we would expect to see:

Hypothesis 3.1: Greater shifts in the size of constituency majorities compared to the last election, especially in seats with specific demographics, such as youthful more highly educated seats increasing their majority size for Labour.

Hypothesis 3.2: We would expect to see traditional secure seats for the main parties showing larger shifts in their majorities. Moreover, a larger amount of these seats will change hands than in previous elections. For example, once safe Labour seats will have reduced majority levels, and in extreme cases will become Conservative-controlled areas.

Hypothesis 3.3: We would also expect to see consistent value divides on questions that tap into the policy areas of immigration and the EU amongst different generations. These would also display evidence in impacting both the Labour and Conservative share of the vote. For example, those sceptical towards the argued benefits of migration and the EU will show signs of being more likely to vote Conservative.

4. If the view that Brexit caused a shift in allegiances is accurate we would expect to witness.

Hypothesis 4.1: Labour gaining seats off the Conservatives in Remain areas, with the Conservatives gaining seats from Labour that backed Leave.

Hypothesis 4.2: We would also see the same pattern for seats that did not change hands. Labour will increase their majorities in areas of larger than average Remain support. Meanwhile, Labour will likely see decreases in their majorities within areas that heavily backed Leave. Alternatively, Conservative-held seats that saw an increase in their majority would have backed Leave, whilst seats that they held with a decreased majority would have voted Remain.

Hypothesis 4.3: The 2016 EU referendum vote recall variable will be statistically significant and be a large determining factor in shifting voting patterns during the campaign. Moreover, how a constituency voted in the EU referendum would be largely significant in causing seats to change control in the regression analysis. Along with this, how parties' were judged to perform on this issue also will be key.

5. If the view that campaign quality and leadership factors were the main drivers of the election outcome we would expect to see changing leadership ratings having a large impact on the two main party's vote share, at a statistically significant level. Moreover, models containing such variables will produce statistical estimates that have large explanatory power. We would also expect to see trends where a change in perceived leadership quality displays a similar change in the likelihood of an individual considering to vote for the leader's respective party.

This book will conclude by assessing the viability of each theory and stating the theories that in all likelihood can most explain the 2017 election result. Before analysing each separate theory identified in this introduction, we will now explore what had changed since the 2015 election and how the election was shaped going into the first week of campaigning. This will identify how strong the Conservatives Party's lead was going into the contest, and establish the potential that existed for large-scale electoral change to occur during the coming campaign.

Chapter 3: Voters' Perceptions of the Parties

Perceptions of party leaders, the parties themselves and how competent they are to handle the biggest issues of the day have consistently been found to influence voting behaviour in UK elections (Whiteley et al. 2013; Clarke, Goodwin and Whiteley 2017). This is broadly known as Valence theory where perceptions of competence can sometimes be more significant in determining election outcomes than voters' analysis of the parties' policy positions (Clarke et al. 2011). The theory focuses on the phycology of voters and produces evidence that voters use party leaders to make judgements on wider political matters they may not pay as much attention to. Leaders voters think are more competent tend to generate more positive assessments of the party they represent, and from this, the party is more likely to gain support. Models that use variables measuring perceptions of leadership quality in previous election studies have produced statistical models with very high levels of explanation, suggesting that perceptions of party leaders, and their perceived performance, matters greatly in determining election outcomes in UK politics (Clarke et al. 2016).

This chapter examines how perceptions of the political parties, and their leaders, changed throughout the campaign. It highlights how Labour's perceptions improved at the same time the Conservative's perceptions declined. It analyses the potential of how parties and their leaders performed during the campaign might have contributed to the closer than expected

election result. The chapter particularly shows how the Conservatives might have started to lose their lead, whilst at the same time, Labour started to make gains after the manifestoes were launched.

This crucially will highlight how leaders' decision-making during the campaign altered the course of the election. In particular, it will show how May's decision to dodge leadership debates and poorly present her manifesto, particularly when she outlined her social care policy, cost the Conservative Party greatly. In contrast, it will show that when Labour was forced to unite for the snap election and compromise around a moderated manifesto the party began to gain support.

Furthermore, the chapter also shows how different management of the main parties' campaigns could have been important in this election. Notably, the decision of May's advisors on keeping May out of the debates, forcing unpopular policies into the manifesto, urging May to take responsibility for these policies and then advising her to U-turn in a publicly shaming way likely hurt the Conservatives. Meanwhile, Labour's decision to keep Corbyn away from public engagements, like May had done badly, appeared to favour his leadership style. Corbyn held rallies to devoted audiences and consequently came across as more likeable and popular than people had initially perceived him. The campaign team had also managed to work with all sections of a divided party to quickly formulate a more moderate and competent manifesto than people had expected, giving their leader the best chance to pitch Labour's vision well. Indeed, Corbyn launched the manifesto well, and with his devoted audience cheering populist left policy commitments it gave media outlets little scope to argue that a Labour government would be an inevitable disaster. Crucially, when the cameras followed Corbyn around the country they only showed positive images from his election campaign tour. Moreover, as Corbyn kept on announcing the same policies the campaign surprisingly was very on-message and the party

seemed to be backing the manifesto, again giving Labour an image of credibility. Notably, these contrasting campaign management styles did coincide with changes in voting intention.

Finally, this chapter also creates regression models to gauge the extent changes in perceived performance did influence voting behaviour. The chapter finds that these models have a high explanatory power and that how parties were perceived to handle the most important issue of the day, Brexit, did influence voting behaviour to a large extent. It also highlights how judgments around politicians might be increasingly shaped by new social and political divides. It particularly highlights how divides on important issues, like Brexit, might become more important in shaping voters' assessments, which may also indicate the growing potential for realignment.

Approval Ratings:

Approval of government:

As mentioned in the previous chapter, the government's approval ratings were better than compared to 2015. However, during the campaign their approval ratings declined, possibly highlighting how government policy announcements during the campaign may have hurt their credibility. This also indicates that sections of the electorate felt the government was not performing well in the election they called. Interestingly, there was an age and qualification divide, where younger more qualified groups of voters began to increasingly have doubts the government was up to the job. There was also a strong Brexit divide, where Remain voters began to think the government was wrong to have called the election and was not performing in the election they instigated. Conversely, Leave voters generally thought the government to be competent throughout the campaign. Interestingly, this highlights how calling the election may have caused these two new political groups to reassess their political opinions.

Table 3.1: Approval of UK government and best party on their most immediate concerns, BES 2017, W12.

Party Best on MII	Low Approval	Middle Approval	High Approval	DK
None	48.76%	29.47%	18.99%	2.79%
Con	3.24%	14.60%	81.20%	0.96%
Lab	82.22%	10.94%	5.15%	1.68%

This development during the campaign might have been significant because how voters viewed government performance correlated highly with political perceptions, party ratings, leadership assessments and perceptions of how competent parties were in dealing with their key concerns. Moreover, table 3.1 shows it also correlated with a voter's stated probability of voting for a given party. For example, groups who had become sceptical of government performance stated better assessments of Labour and a higher chance of voting for Labour than compared to the average voter. Groups who felt the government was competent perceived the Conservatives to be best placed on the biggest issues of the day and stated a higher likelihood of backing them.

Interestingly, figure 3.1 highlights these dividing lines were consistent across the campaign, where Remainer groups were less inclined to vote Tory, whilst Brexiteers consistently backed the government. This clear divide shows how a new divide may be constructing British politics to such an extent it now shapes political perceptions, and from this help shape voting patterns.

Younger voters - Government approval, 2017   Older voters - Government approval, 2017
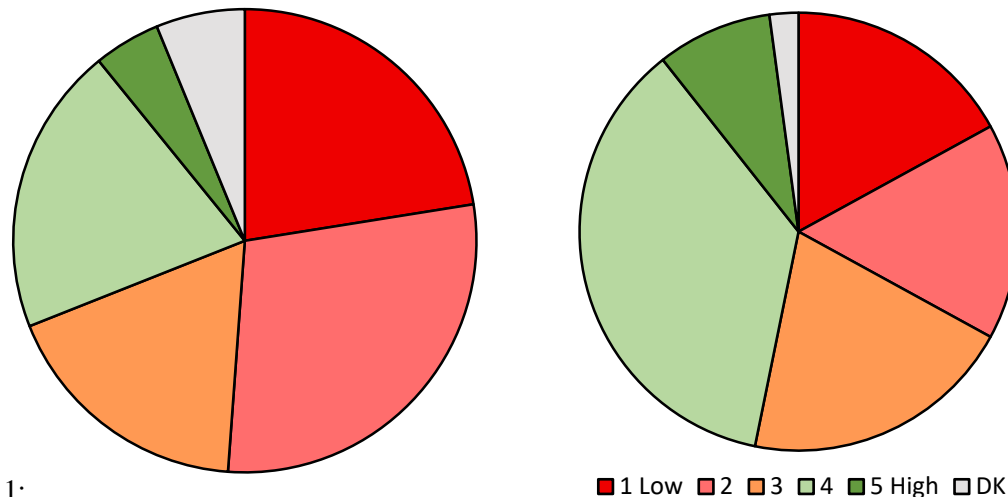

Figure 3.1:

Legend: ■ 1 Low ■ 2 ■ 3 ■ 4 ■ 5 High □ DK

13

Figure 3.1: Government approval by age, 2017. It displays how there was a clear generational divide in assessing the government's performance. Generally speaking younger more qualified groups, especially those who voted Remain, increasingly disapproved of government performance as the campaign progressed, which only helped Labour secure the opposition vote.

Ratings of the parties:

Averages:

Table 3.2: Ratings of the Conservative & Labour Party, 2017 BES, W12-13.

Election Week	Average of like Con	Average of like Lab	Lab Diff
24/04/2017 - 30/04/2017	4.55	4.32	-0.23
01/05/2017 - 07/05/2017	4.51	4.40	-0.11
08/05/2017 - 14/05/2017	4.60	4.27	-0.33
15/05/2017 - 21/05/2017	4.53	4.50	-0.04
22/05/2017 - 28/05/2017	4.38	4.66	0.29
29/05/2017 - 04/06/2017	4.35	4.74	0.39
05/06/2017 - 11/06/2017	4.25	4.74	0.49
12/06/2017 - 18/06/2017	4.05	4.90	0.84
19/06/2017 - 23/06/2017	3.92	5.05	1.14
Campaign AVG	**4.36**	**4.59**	**0.23**

The Labour Party started off slightly behind the Conservatives in the electorate's ratings of the two main parties, see table 3.2. However, by the end of the campaign Labour is more liked by the average voter, showing the extent the campaign changed the parties' fortunes. Therefore, as Labour ran a better than expected campaign, and released a more moderate than expected manifesto, the party was more highly rated. Meanwhile, post-May's campaign blunders the Conservatives experienced a decline in their ratings, importantly showing how campaign decisions might have impacted the final result and allowed Labour to close the gap.

The Conservatives Party's ratings:

Focusing on the Conservative Party's ratings it is clear that the party lost credibility at the same time Labour was gaining favourability. The party particularly experienced a decline in ratings

amongst younger and more highly qualified Remain groups. In contrast, the party's higher ratings generally stayed intact amongst older, less educated Leave based groups, see figure 3.2. Crucially, amongst this group, although their ratings dipped slightly after the manifesto launch they were still higher than Labour's. These trends could be incredibly important as they correlate with the probability to vote for the Conservative Party. Groups whose ratings of the Conservative Party displayed the largest decline clearly became less likely to vote for the Conservatives, and instead indicated higher support for Labour. Significantly, this indicates the blunders the Tory campaign had might have weakened support for their party and awarded support for a renewed Labour Party. Further, this again highlights how calling election may have forced voters to reassess their political loyalties as it forced individuals to think about the new political divide that was created in the previous year during the EU referendum campaign.

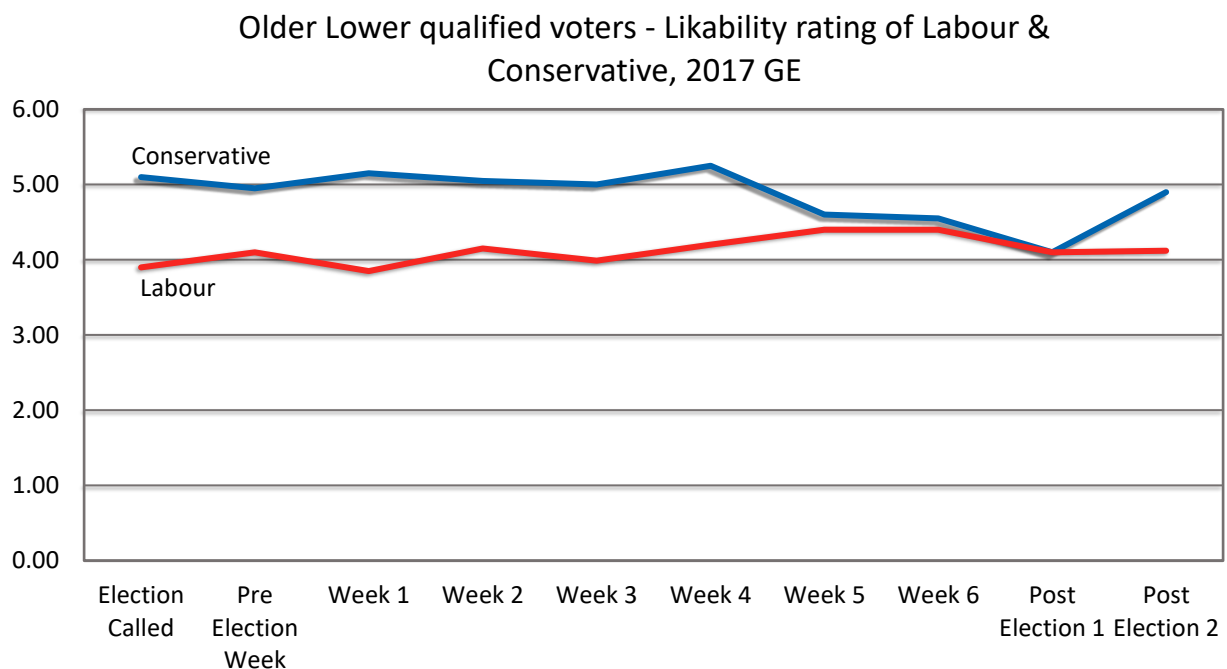**Older Lower qualified voters - Likability rating of Labour & Conservative, 2017 GE**

Figure 3.2: Older voters with fewer qualifications and their ratings of the two main parties, Source: BES 2017. It shows that the Conservative Party's support primarily came from Brexiteer, older and lower qualified groups of voters. This trend was fairly consistent throughout the campaign.

Labour's Ratings:

Table 3.3: Labour Rating and probability to vote Labour, 2017 BES.

Probability	Dislike Lab	Middle Lab	Like Lab
Low	82.04%	16.51%	0.57%
Middle	18.77%	69.15%	3.51%
High	2.56%	21.13%	55.21%

Alternatively, figure 3.3 shows Labour experienced a steady increase in positive ratings from Remain based groups, defined as younger voters who had obtained graduate-level qualifications. Labour also experienced a slight uptick in ratings from their Leave base which helped them secure a broader base of support, consequently enabling them to close the gap on the government. Critically, this indicates Labour's better than expected performance, along with their vague Brexit policy, helped them secure their weakening Leave base along with a new Remain base which was united in opposition to the government. Again, these developments within the campaign had the potential to be very significant as the very groups that awarded Labour higher ratings also expressed a much higher likelihood of voting Labour over the Conservative Party alternative. Therefore, the good campaign Labour had might have been essential for their better than expected result.

Figure 3.3: Highly Educated voters & how much Labour & Conservative are liked, 2017 GE
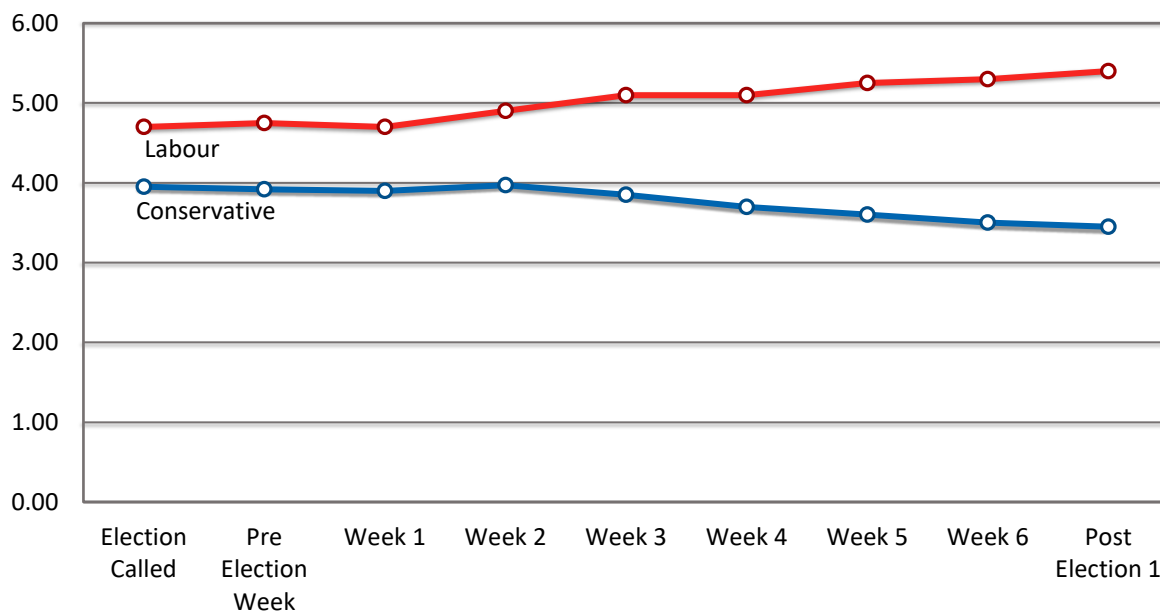
Figure 3.3: Labour and Conservative Party rating by education. It displays how Labour gained more favourable ratings amongst highly educated voters. The graph also shows that the 2017 election brought social divisions that had likely been carried on from the 2016 EU referendum.

Ratings of the Party Leaders:

Averages:

Ratings of the party leaders can sometimes be more important than the ratings of the parties they represent. Importantly, in the election campaign there was a big shift in the two main parties' leadership assessments, see figure 3.4. Corbyn clearly started a fair way behind May in the average assessment given by the electorate. Yet, after the week the manifestoes were launched May's ratings steadily declined, and crucially this coincided with a rise in Corbyn's ratings. Again, this indicates that Labour's well-received manifesto launch compared to May's unpopular manifesto launch could have been a crucial turning point in the election.

Moreover, it also represents that it was likely that the momentum shifted Labour's way at the same time the Conservatives backtracked on some of their manifesto commitments. As May looked rattled in her U-turn announcements and found it difficult to engage with the public Corbyn looked at ease in front of his devoted crowds. These events seemed to reverse the party leaders' images that had been constructed in the previous year. May had always presented herself as a responsible, in control and likeable politician who would be straight with the public, whereas Corbyn struggled to come across as a leader who could be well rated amongst a large section of the electorate. Yet, May's U-turn on key policy announcements, alongside breaking her commitment not to call an election, alongside Corbyn's string of successful rallies gave the reverse image. Crucially, these events could have changed the party leader's fortunes and shifted voting patterns as leaders who receive improved ratings generally throughout British political history have fared better in elections than leaders who have poor and declining ratings.

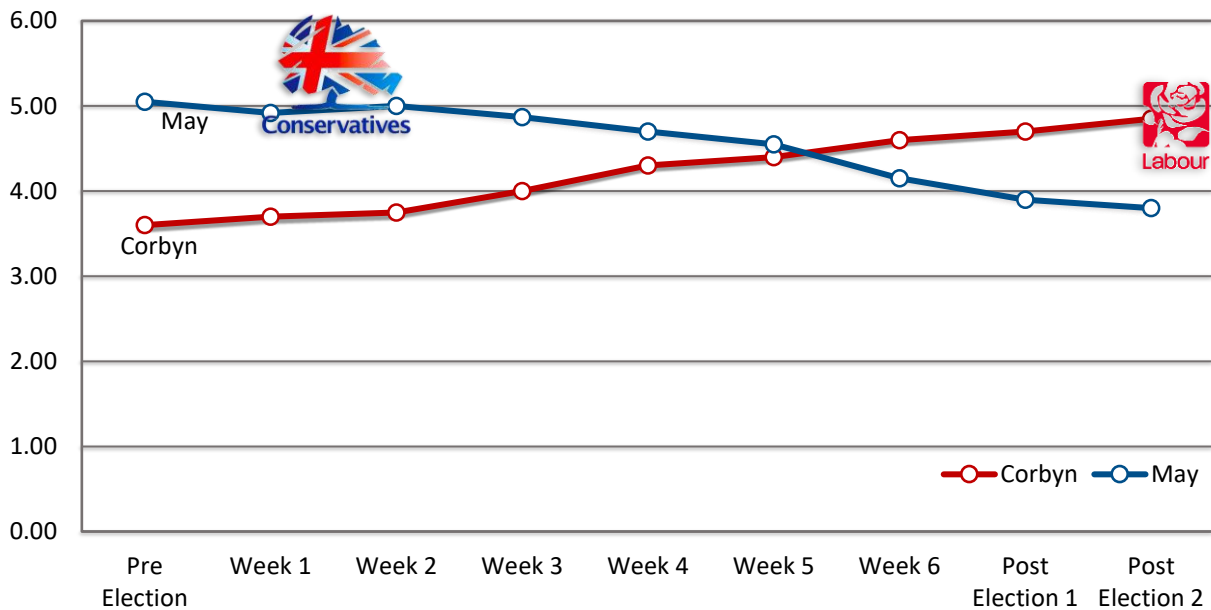The rate the electorate liked May / Corbyn throughout the campaign, BES 2017.

Figure 3.4: shows the changes in the party leader's fortunes across the election campaign. After the election Corbyn overtakes May, and on polling day May is only very slightly ahead.

May:

Table 3.4: Probability to vote Conservative by a voter's rating of PM May, BES 2017, W12-13.

Probability	Dislike May	Middle May	Like May
Low	88.30%	10.12%	0.81%
Middle	19.62%	69.33%	3.13%
High	2.12%	21.10%	52.85%

Interestingly, PM May's ratings stayed fairly strong amongst certain groups of the electorate. Figure 3.5 shows how those in older cohorts with fewer qualifications quite consistently rated May over Corbyn throughout the election, even though her lead did close slightly with this group. This indicates that May had the support of voters most likely to have voted to Leave but struggled to make any gains amongst groups more likely to have backed Remain. Indeed, it would appear the Conservatives had maxed out their support from Leave groups before the

start of the election and, in hindsight, they were always likely to find it difficult holding onto their new large base. Crucially, May's decline meant that voters stated they were less likely to vote for the Conservatives, leaving many voters in limbo for Labour to scoop up, see table 3.4.
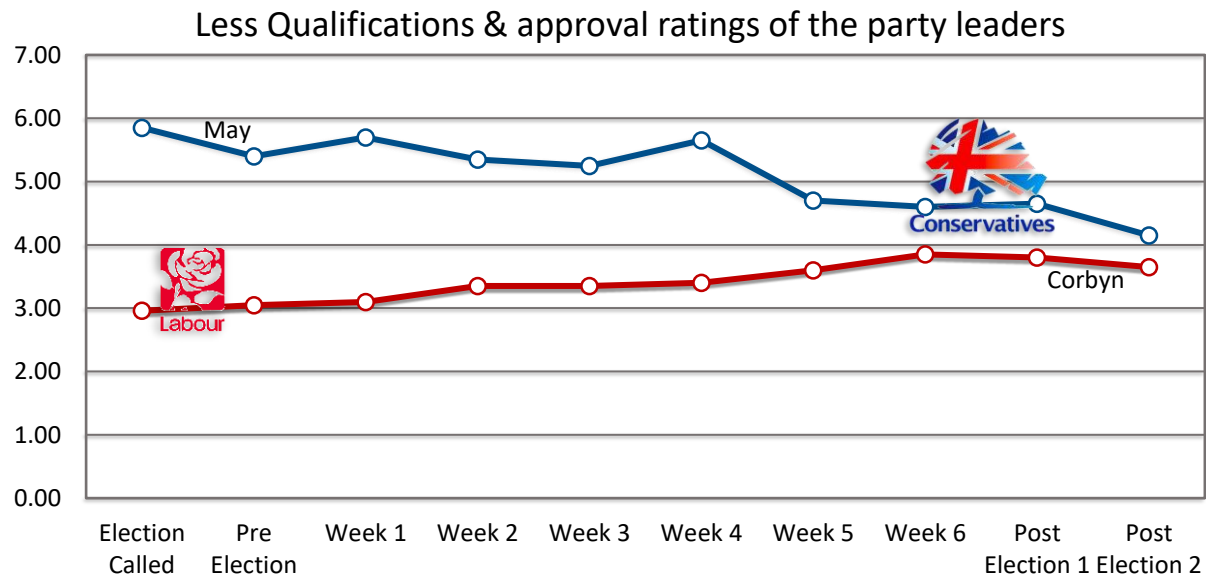

Figure 3.5: Party leader approval by education group. It shows how the Conservative Party leader led amongst groups of voters more likely to associate with the Brexit side of the EU debate. This may have limited the party's capacity to appeal to a wide section of the electorate.

Corbyn:

Table 3.5: Probability to vote Labour by a voter's rating of Corbyn, BES 2017, W12-13.

Probability	Dislike Corbyn	Middle Corbyn	Like Corbyn
Low	80.42%	13.43%	1.74%
Middle	37.70%	41.69%	7.72%
High	12.11%	22.58%	48.00%

Labour found it easy to hoard voters who grew increasingly sceptical of the Conservative Party's credibility. The groups who had grown most concerned with May's leadership style (younger, highly qualified Remain voters) began to look for an alternative that could stop the government from gaining a large majority. As Corbyn's campaign went better than many

thought the group who most opposed to the government began to perceive Corbyn as a more credible option. Corbyn's ratings amongst this group gave him a clear lead over May. Moreover, Corbyn's vague commitment to a soft Brexit later in the campaign allowed him to gain support amongst groups more likely to have voted Brexit. Therefore, Labour sucked up the opposition to the government, yet they also retained their Leave base, who often had conflicting policy objectives. These trends could have been very important in shaping the election result as they may have affected political perceptions and voting patterns. Those who expressed a higher opinion of Corbyn over May tended to feel the Labour Party was more competent on the biggest issues of the day. They also tended to express a higher likelihood of considering to vote for Labour compared to the Conservative Party, see table 3.5. Therefore, the changing leadership ratings the two main party leaders experienced could have been crucial as it may have allowed Labour to close the gap on the government.

Crucially, this also highlights the wider prospect of a realignment currently developing within the UK political system. This is because there appears to be a new consistent social and political divide that is shaping political perceptions, and from this partly determining voting patterns, see figure 3.6. This consistency in thoughts around questions that tapped into Britain's identity and place in the world possibly represents a new ideological divide that had the capacity to shape political outcomes. Moreover, as voters were distributed across this new ideological divide differently from the traditional left/right economic divide, of which has historically shaped the outcome of general elections, this can possibly explain why voters split across the two main parties fairly evenly during the campaign. Further, these divisions are the same ones that existed in the 2016 EU referendum, indicating that these divides were carried into 2017, and therefore how voters felt about Brexit likely determined their views, political perceptions, and from this, their voting behaviour.
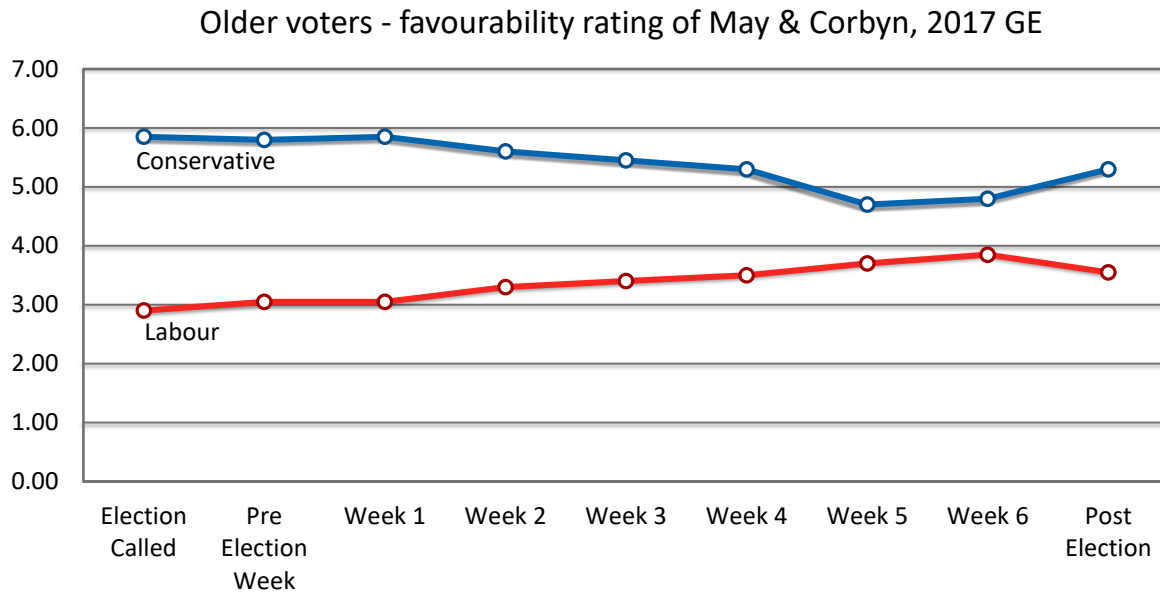
Older voters - favourability rating of May & Corbyn, 2017 GE

Figure 3.6: Rating of Corbyn, older voters. It highlights how Corbyn's ratings improved amongst voters in groups Labour was struggling with, older, less qualified, Leave groups. This likely helped Labour hold onto its Leave base, allowing them to force a close election result.

Best PM:

Average:

Figure 3.7 outlines how PM May's lead over Corbyn in being seen as the party leader best for the role of Prime Minister (PM) declined quite heavily throughout the campaign. May had a 50% lead over Corbyn at the start of the campaign, but May's lead was only around 20% the week voting took place. This sharp decline showed that May's campaign blunders might have cost the Conservatives their image of being the natural party of government. It also shows that these blunders might have cost the Conservatives their image of being seen as the most competent party, which subsequently allowed Labour, and Corbyn, to challenge the government. Moreover, this is also a sign that May's leadership credibility, and specifically leading Britain into the Brexit negotiations, could have been damaged from this election, again giving Labour an opportunity to reduce the government's lead.

Crucially, it can again be stated that the government calling the election only dented their credibility and gave the opposition a chance to secure wavering voters' support.

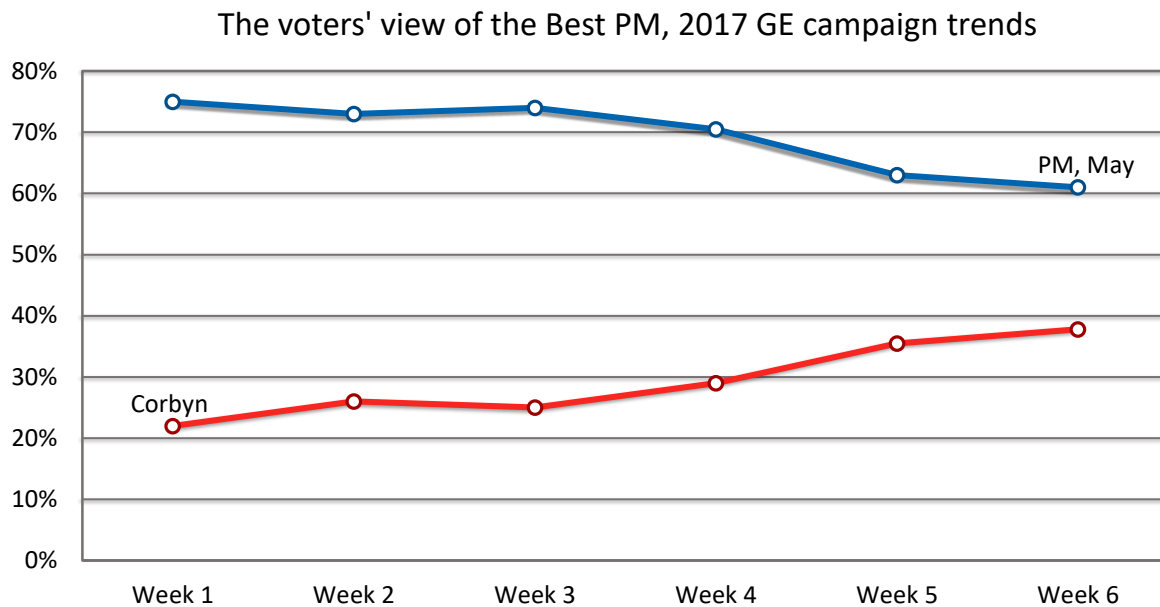The voters' view of the Best PM, 2017 GE campaign trends

Figure 3.7. View on the best PM during the campaign. Source: BES 2017. This output shows how May's credibility as the natural PM declined throughout the campaign.

May's decline as the natural PM and Corbyn's improvement:

May's decline was not uniform across society. Older cohorts, individuals with fewer qualifications and Leave voters all displayed much lower declines in perceptions of May's ability to carry out the role of PM, see figure 3.8. PM May's decline instead was steeper amongst younger, highly educated, Remain voters. Although these voters also acknowledged May would make a better PM at the start of the campaign, by the end of the election they stated the two candidates were fairly evenly suited to the job of PM. This group of voters in particular saw a large transformation in the credibility of the parties and their respective leaders. This could have been incredibly important to shaping the election outcome as opinions on which leader made the best PM correlated with the likelihood to vote for the party they were leading. Therefore, as more voters expressed Corbyn would do just as good a job as PM May more

voters also stated a higher likelihood of considering to vote Labour. As a result, the change in perceived competence can be said to have helped Labour.
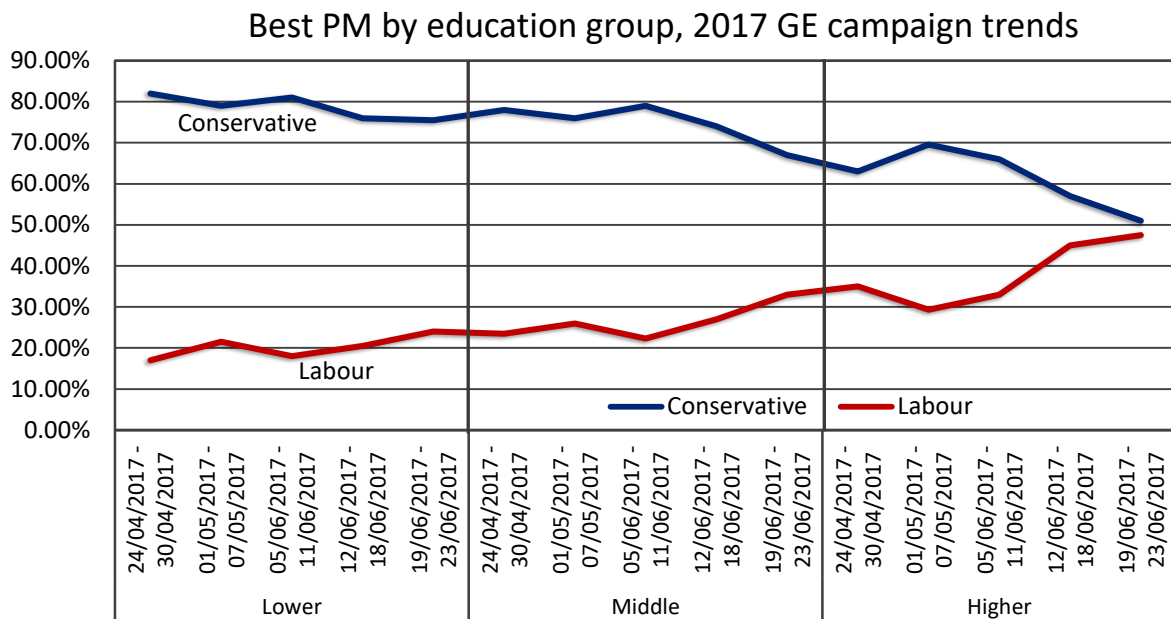
Best PM by education group, 2017 GE campaign trends

Figure 3.8: Views on which party leader would make the best PM. Source: BES 2017 – waves 11-12. It shows that during the campaign May's decline in being seen to perform in the PM role occurred most amongst higher educated groupings.

Best Part on voter's most pressing concern:

Table 3.6: Best party on a voter's biggest concern and their stated probability of voting for Conservative. Source: BES 2017.

Party	Low Probability	Middle	High Probability	DK
None	51.30%	14.51%	21.25%	6.73%
Conservative	4.55%	6.13%	**81.88%**	1.62%
Labour	**88.02%**	6.10%	2.17%	2.35%

The Conservatives also had a clear lead on being seen to be able to handle the voters' biggest concerns of the day at the start of the election. This lead was around 25% and Labour was so far behind they found themselves in third, behind the number of voters who felt no party could handle the country's biggest issues. However, this lead was cut to just over 10% by the end of

the election. Again, the Conservatives Party's decline coincides with a steady rise in Labour's perceived credibility, see figure 3.9.

Labour may have gained support from Remainers who initially felt no party could handle the Brexit issue. Meanwhile, the Conservatives may have lost support from Leave voters after Labour committed to a vague soft Brexit position. This development will have limited Labour's losses to the Tories, whilst allowing them to suck up enough votes to gradually close their polling deficit. Crucially, as the gap narrowed this meant fewer voters stated a high probability of voting Conservatives and more voters indicated a higher likelihood of backing Labour, see table 3.6. Significantly, this meant that the chances of Labour closing the gap on the government increased throughout the campaign.

Moreover, as the Conservatives became less trusted to handle the most pressing issues of the day the chances the Conservatives could hang on to their new large electoral base decreased. This meant the gains Labour were likely to make from this development, alongside the losses the Conservatives would suffer would bring the two parties closer together, increasing the chances of a hung parliament. This again shows how crucial changing perceptions of the parties' competence may have been in creating the shock hung parliament result.

As we shall see later in the chapter these trends, in particular, did influence voters' decision-making during the 2017 election, which again highlights just how important Labour's improved ratings during the campaign were, as without this change the government likely would have retained their majority. Therefore, in hindsight, it can again be said that calling the election only gave the Tories a chance to damage the credibility they had built since Cameron resigned, whilst it provided Labour with the much-needed opportunity to communicate their agenda. As a result, how their leaders reacted to this unexpected event, and how different voters responded to the snap election, may have partly shaped the election.
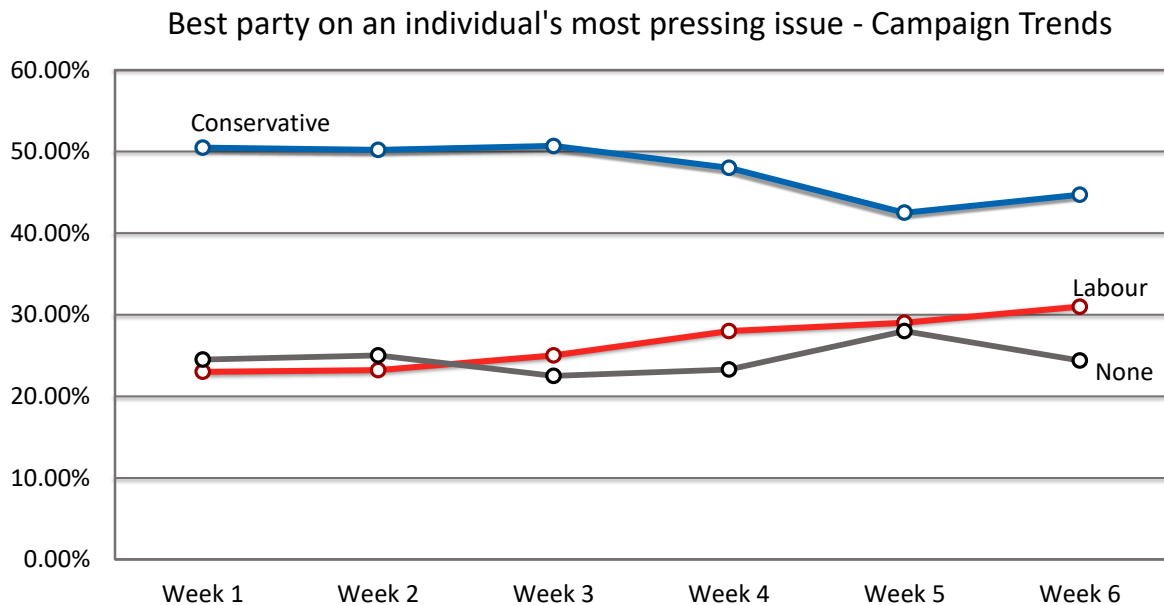
Best party on an individual's most pressing issue - Campaign Trends

Figure 3.9: Best party on an individual's biggest issue across the campaign (BES). It highlights how the Conservatives were seen as less credible on the biggest issue of the day, mostly thought to be Brexit, as the campaign progressed. Labour experienced the opposite trend.

Sociological divides over party competence:

Interestingly, the same social divides that have divided political perceptions throughout the chapter also shaped trends on perceived party competence on the voters' biggest concerns. The Conservatives gained most of their support from older, less qualified, Leave-voting groups. Meanwhile, most of Labour's support arose through voters who were younger, had more qualifications and were more likely to associate with the Remain side, see figure 3.10. Yet, the Conservatives did lose support amongst their base and some of this support went to Labour. Therefore, Labour's vague soft Brexit approach might have allowed them to increasingly secure the confidence of Remain voters across the campaign, but also hang onto their wavering leave vote. This possibility is explored in more detail in the Brexit chapter.

These trends also show the potential emergence of a realignment during the 2017 election. Labour might have gained rapid support due to shifts in voting behaviour that benefitted them.

For example, the large body of Remain voters who had left the Lib-Dems and Greens only had one natural home to flow toward, Labour. This made it easier for Labour to persuade this group of voters that they were the more credible option on the biggest issue of the day, the Brexit issue. Therefore, as Labour improved many disillusioned Remain voters who felt no party was credible on their biggest issue began to compromise around Labour, especially when they feared May's harder Brexit vision for the country, of which had been outlined in several speeches. Therefore, this natural divide that had been created from the EU referendum now benefitted Labour as although the Tories secured many Leave voters Labour now was sucking up the disillusioned Remain voters who felt smaller parties were no longer were a credible option. These voters, most of whom had no committed support at the start of the campaign, began to flow to Labour in large numbers. As Labour offered something to their wavering Leave voters the Conservatives began to lose some of their newfound base, which in hindsight turned out to be weak support. Therefore, calling the snap election exposed this national divide, and rather than settling the Brexit issue it revealed a realigned divided electorate.
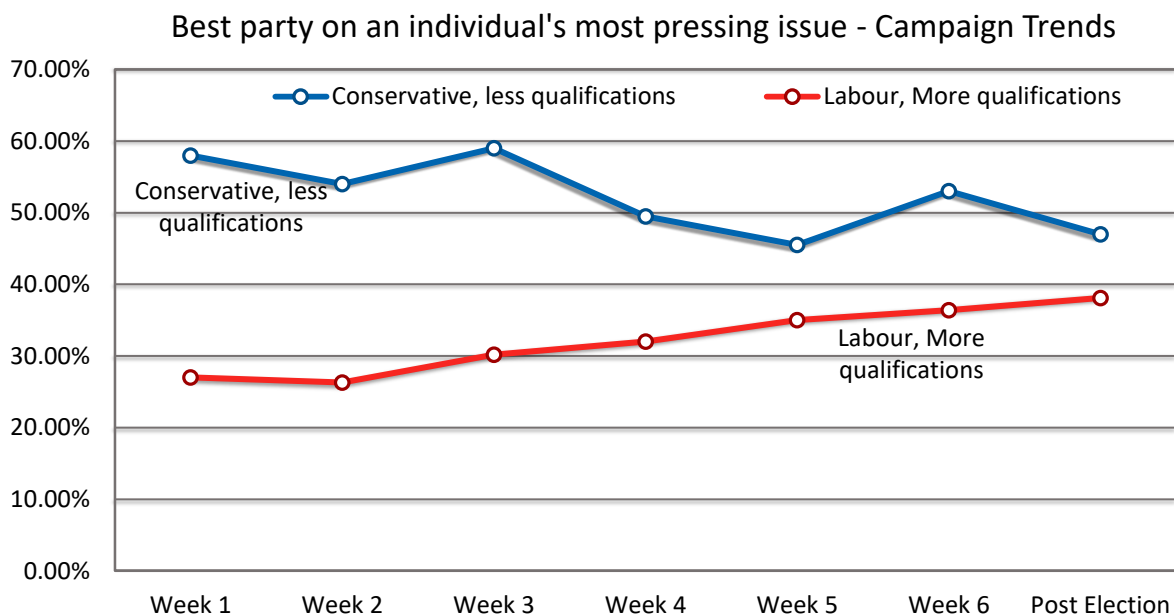

Figure 3.10: Best Party on voters' biggest issue by education group. It displays that the Tories were most trusted to handle key concerns with those who had not had access to higher education

Alternatively, Labour gained their support most amongst those with higher qualifications.

Party Unity:

Average:

The two main parties experienced a change in how united they appeared to be. Understandably, as Labour went into the campaign having placed a vote of no confidence in their leader the electorate believed Labour to be un-unified. The Conservatives on the other hand having backed their leader to call an early election appeared much more unified at the start of the campaign in the eyes of the electorate. Yet, figure 3.11 highlights as the campaign progressed the proportion of voters who felt Labour could not unite decreased. This particularly happened after the main parties' manifestos were released. The snap election had forced Labour to compromise around a moderate manifesto, allowing all sections of the party to support the campaign as it had something for every faction. Alternatively, the Conservatives struggled to keep unity after May's poorly received manifesto and U-turns appeared to be costing the Tories their planned large majority. Crucially, this shows that the election only helped Labour unite and appear as a credible opposition.

Average of united score across the 2017 Campaign, 2017 BES, Waves 12-13.
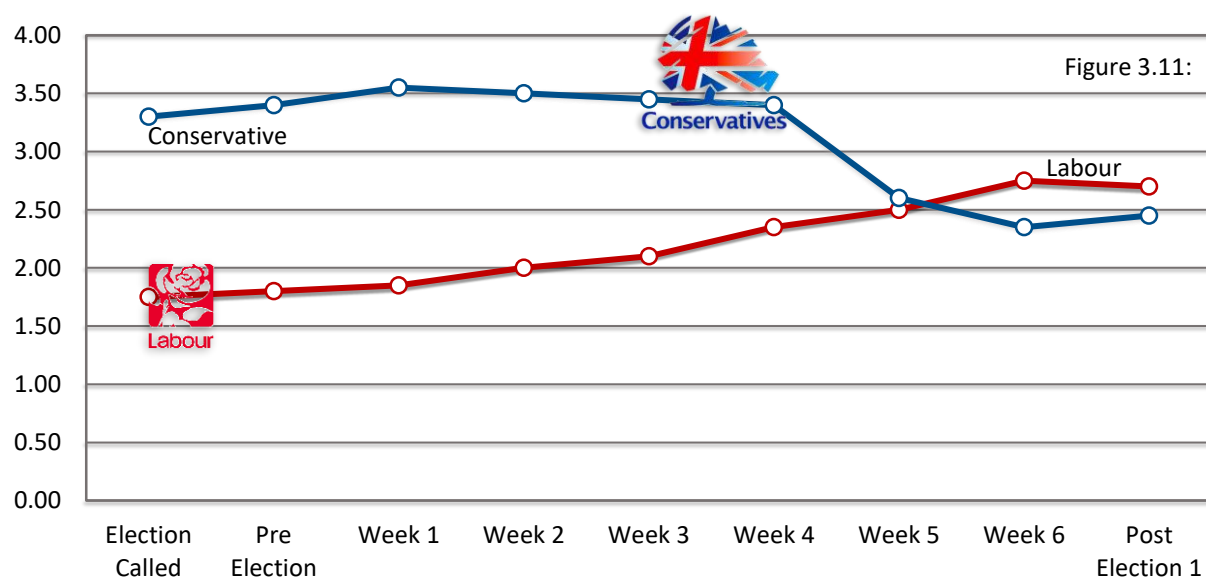

Figure 3.11:

Figure 3.11. Party unity scores across the campaign. The graph shows that the election campaign caused Labour to come across as more unified and hurt the government's united image. This could have helped Labour close their deficit to the Conservatives.

The same social divides exist regards to party unity assessments:

Labour's renewed unity was most recognised amongst younger, more highly qualified Remain voters, see figure 3.12. Labour began to once again be seen as a credible party most with these voters. The Conservatives kept their perceived government unity amongst older, less qualified Leave voters. Whilst Labour did make some inroads with this group, the Conservatives kept their lead over Labour amongst these voters. However, by the end of the election Labour was seen as a more unified force by groups of voters more likely to have backed Remain. This indicates that the election allowed Labour to announce a manifesto that groups increasingly opposed to the government could get behind. This helped Labour suck up the opposition to the government vote, which mostly had come from poorly performing third parties (the Lib-Dems and Greens). Therefore, in hindsight, it can again be stated that calling the election was a bad strategy for the government as it forced the opposition to unite and this helped improve the opposition's level of support, which in the end would result in a hung parliament.

Figure 3.12 - Young voters & their percpetions of how united the parties were
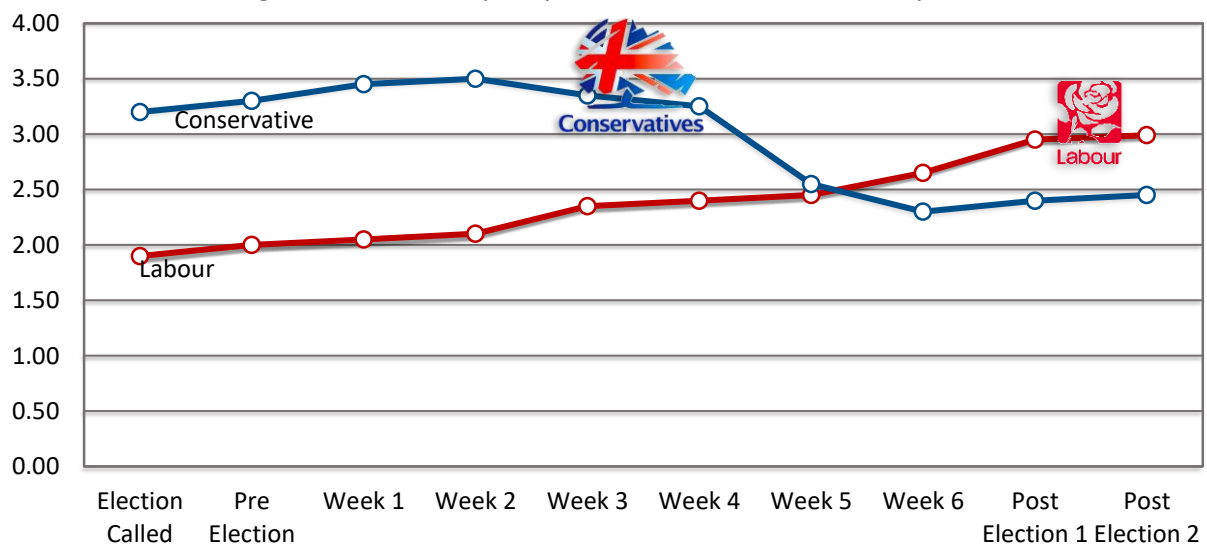
Figure 3.12: Party unity perceptions by younger voters (2017). It displays how Labour appeared to unify most amongst younger voters, those most opposed to the government. This likely helped unify the opposition against the government, thus helping to create a hung parliament.

Model 3.1: A linear regression model estimating a voter's stated probability of voting for Labour and Conservative throughout the campaign based on key variables measuring voters' perceptions of the parties and their leaders. Source: BES 2017, W12.

Dependent variable:	Probability to vote for:	
Linear Regression	Con (1)	Lab (2)
Best party on biggest issue - Conservative	0.915***	-0.342***
	(0.045)	(0.050)
Best party on biggest issue - Labour	-0.310***	0.669***
	(0.059)	(0.066)
Best party on biggest issue - Other	-0.587***	-0.754***
	(0.090)	(0.100)
Like - May	0.049***	0.035***
	(0.009)	(0.010)
Like - Corbyn	-0.018***	0.041***
	(0.006)	(0.007)
Best Prime Minister	-0.601***	0.059**
	(0.024)	(0.027)
Like - Con	0.688***	-0.161***
	(0.009)	(0.010)
Like - Lab	-0.120***	0.789***
	(0.007)	(0.008)
Con - United	0.053***	0.071
	(0.014)	(0.016)
Labour - United	-0.063***	-0.040
	(0.017)	(0.018)
Approve of the Government	0.158***	-0.044**
	(0.020)	(0.022)
Labour Change NHS	-0.038***	0.217***
	(0.013)	(0.014)
Government Change Education	0.005	-0.129***

	(0.016)	(0.017)
Government Change Crime	-0.011	-0.059***
	(0.015)	(0.016)
Constant	2.472***	1.125***
	(0.119)	(0.132)
Observations	19,204	19,226
R^2	0.843	0.765
Adjusted R^2	0.843	0.764
Residual Std. Error	1.731 (df = 19188)	1.923 (df = 19210)
Significance Note:	*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01	

Linear regression results analysis:

The estimated impact of Leadership and voter perception on voting behaviour:

Model 3.1 shows that being seen to perform best on the most important issue of the campaign was critical for the parties' successes and failures in the election. The average voter stated that the most important issue through the campaign was that of Brexit and the coming EU negotiations. This meant that Britain's place in the world, our trading relationships and overall foreign policy was unusually high on the agenda going into a general election. When the Conservative Party was deemed to get this policy right or was better than other parties, they were significantly more likely to receive that voter's support. Labour gained the same effect when they were seen as competent on the biggest issue above other parties. In this scenario, Labour became more likely than the Conservative Party to start receiving votes. This is critical because feelings of Labour being best placed to deal with the most pressing issue of the day went up during the campaign, whilst the Conservative Party's performance went down. Consequently, the likelihood to vote Conservative over Labour decreased during the campaign, allowing Labour to close the gap, see effect plot 3.1. Therefore, it can be said identifying the differing opinions that caused voters to perceive the Conservatives more favourably than Labour, and vice versa is important in understanding the reasons behind why Labour was able

to close the gap. One such reason why these trends may have occurred was because of May's policy blunders relative to Labour's policy moderation in the first weeks of the campaign. Again, this does highlight a strong likelihood that different campaign styles and performances had a huge impact in this particular election.

Moreover, there was a similar pattern regarding how parties were rated by voters throughout the election. The better rated the Conservative Party was, the more likely the party were to receive votes. Meanwhile, when Labour was highly rated they could expect to receive support. If the Conservative Party was better rated Labour would find it harder to attract such a voter's ballot, and vice versa, when Labour was more highly rated than the Conservative Party. This again is important as across the campaign Labour becomes more favoured, whilst the Conservative Party's ratings declined, meaning the gap between the two parties declined. Therefore, again it can be said that understanding the reasons behind why these two party's ratings changed during the election is key to understanding why the two party's fortunes changed during the campaign.

One reason behind the change in the party's ratings, and from this their share of the vote, might have been down to the changes in party leader ratings during the campaign. Model 3.1 shows us that as a party leader's ratings increased so did their party's share of the vote. From the survey analysis done earlier, it was shown that May's ratings decreased as the campaign progressed, whilst Corbyn's increased. Moreover, their ratings changed dramatically amongst groups most likely to vote for them, increasing the chances that social divisions would start to influence divisions in voting behaviour. Interestingly, effect plot 3.2 shows this was the same effect for changing party ratings. Crucially, this could help to explain why Labour was able to close the gap as they received support from a bloc that was forming against the Conservative Party and was warming to Labour and its perceived improved leadership. These events during

the campaign might have simply hurt the Conservative Party's leadership image, whilst it enhanced Labour's. It was noted earlier that Labour's perceptions improved whilst the Conservative Party's decreased during the election week that the manifestoes were launched. This indicates that the swing occurred as the manifestos were launched and that these events changed the respective party leader's perceived leadership abilities. From this event, the perceived gap in leadership abilities began to decline and in polling week the Conservatives were only slightly ahead of Labour. The gap had closed to a very tight point and this might have reduced the ability for the Conservative Party to gain votes over Labour. This may have decreased to the point where the Conservatives became less likely to increase the number of seats they had and became more at risk of losing seats. Therefore, changing leadership ratings in all probability does at least partly explain why the UK found itself in a shock hung parliament scenario after polling day.

This trend also was reflected in those who saw May or Corbyn as the best future Prime minister. May lost her large lead over Corbyn as being seen as the best party leader to perform the role of PM, and therefore lost the significant increasing effect it had over causing voters to choose Conservative more often than Labour. Moreover, how much voters approved of the government's performance also helped increase the Conservative Party's vote share over Labour. However, as the Conservative government performed poorly in the campaign a smaller proportion of the electorate felt the government was performing at a high level, giving Labour an opportunity to win over more voters than they could have hoped for at the start of the election. On top of this, negative changes in government performance in public service provision and the economic outlook appear to have helped drag down the Conservative vote share, whilst increasing Labour's share. Along with this, Labour also was seen as more able to improve some public services than a future Conservative government, which also appears to have increased the Labour's vote share, whilst the Conservative Party's declined. Therefore,

the perceived declined ability for the Conservatives to handle the biggest issues and public services might have been important in producing the hung parliament.
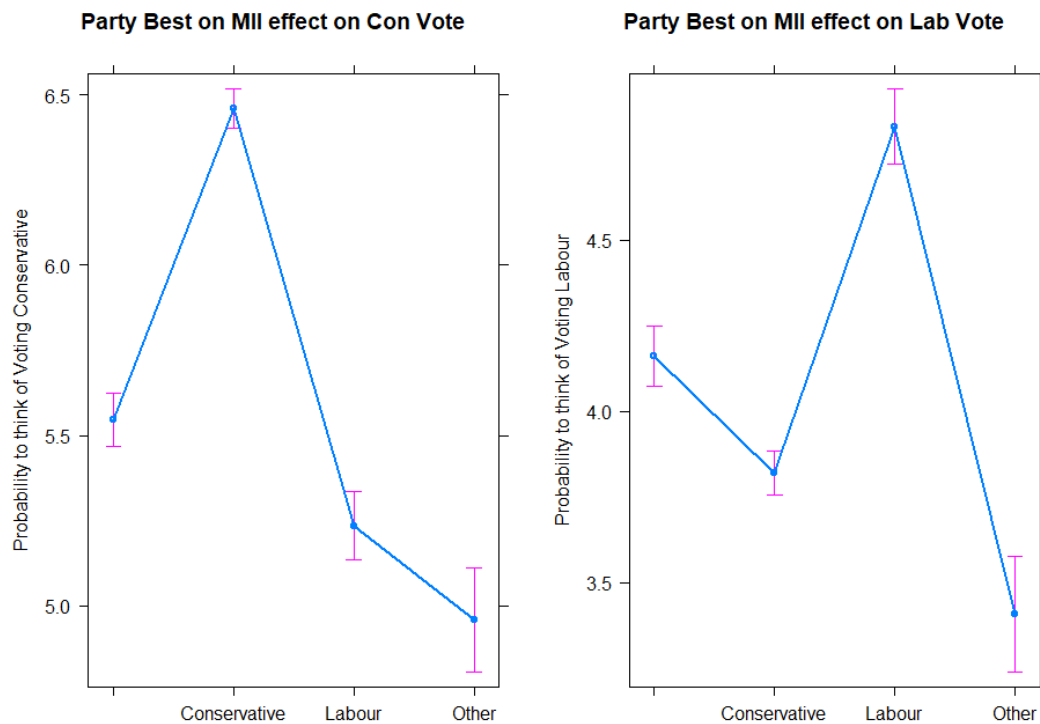
Effect Plot 3.1 Best party on a voter's biggest issue, Source: BES 2017. It shows how a voter's perception of which party performed best on their largest concern greatly influenced the probability of voting for both of the two main parties.

Overall, models including variables that recorded perceptions of performance explain 75% of the variation in the likelihood of considering to vote for the two main parties, a high performing statistical model. Therefore, it can be said that overall performance during the campaign appears to have benefited the Labour vote over the Conservative vote, indicating how Labour was able to close the gap on the Conservative Party. Therefore, understanding why the two party's favourability ratings altered during the election is crucial to understanding the closer than expected election result.

Like Lab effect on Con Vote share   **Like Lab effect on Lab Vote Share**
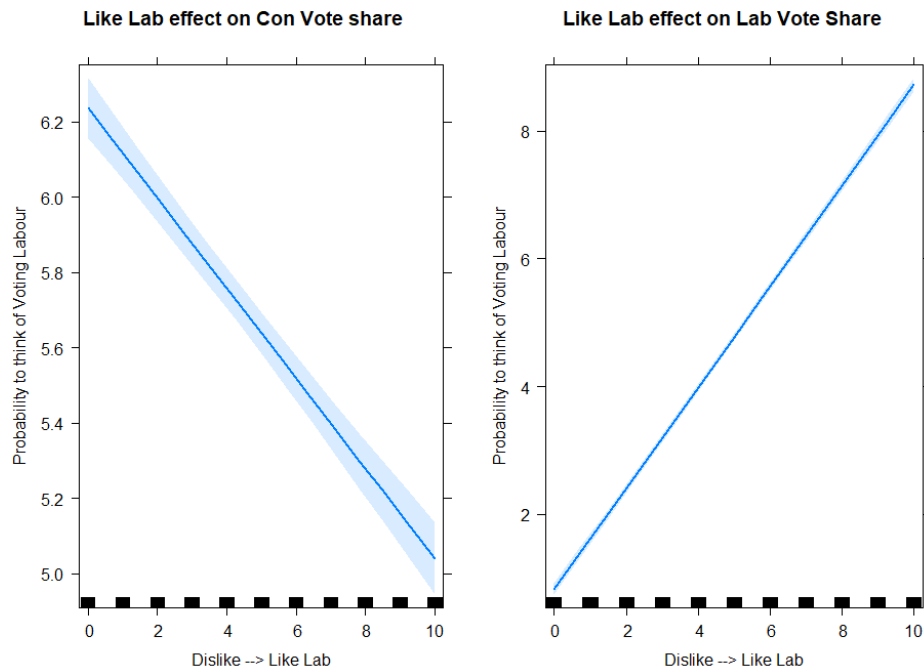
Effect Plot 3.2: Rating of the Labour Party and the effect it had upon a voter's stated probability of voting for the two main parties, Source: BES 2017. It displays how ratings of a party greatly affected the probability of a party gaining a vote. This was also the same for party leadership (May and Corbyn) ratings.

Multi-nominal model Analysis:

Table 3.7: summary of results from model 3.2:

Voting probability:	Conservative	Labour	Others
Con Best on MII	48.74%	16.81%	34.45%
Lab Best on MII	14.84%	42.98%	42.18%
Best PM: May	57.44%	19.56%	23.01%
Best PM: Corbyn	8.57%	25.78%	65.65%
Like Con	72.38%	4.49%	23.13%
Like Lab	9.49%	60.25%	30.26%
Disapprove Govt	15.98%	62.17%	21.85%
Approve Govt	51.17%	16.88%	31.95%

Model 3.2 tends to reflect the findings in the linear model. It reinforces the finding that if an individual perceived the Conservative Party to be the best party to perform on their most

important issue then they were much more likely to back the Conservatives over any other party, especially Labour. In contrast, if Labour was seen to perform best on a voter's stated most pressing concern the Labour Party was more likely to receive a vote than compared to any of the other parties, especially over the Conservative Party. This was also reflected in perception regarding which candidate was best to be Prime Minister. If a voter saw May as the PM then the Conservatives were much more likely to pick up these voter's ballots, whereas if a voter perceived Corbyn as a better PM then Labour became more likely to pick up support.

This pattern was also reflected in perceptions of the party leaders in general, where those who rated May better than Corbyn were more probable to back the Conservative Party over Labour, see figure 3.12. Conversely, those rating Corbyn better were more likely to choose Labour over any other party. Meanwhile, those who were more receptive to the Conservative Party's image more often than not backed the Conservative Party, whilst those who began to see Labour as a better option were more likely to choose Labour over other options.

Finally, those who felt the government was performing well in economic outcomes, public service provision and overall performance tended to be more likely to cast a ballot re-electing the government than compared to opting for a different party. Those who saw the government as performing poorly on these matters tended to back Labour, or another party, over the Conservative Party. This model importantly shows that matters of performance was not just important in influencing party vote shares, but also the probability a voter would choose one party over another. This indicates that Labour improving their perceived performance, potentially due to the manifestoes being released, might have been a key factor in producing a closer than expected election result. Therefore, this also raises the possibility the events the snap election brought, of which impacted upon party leaders' fortunes, may have been very important in shaping the election outcomes as well.

Valence variables & probability to vote for the two main parties

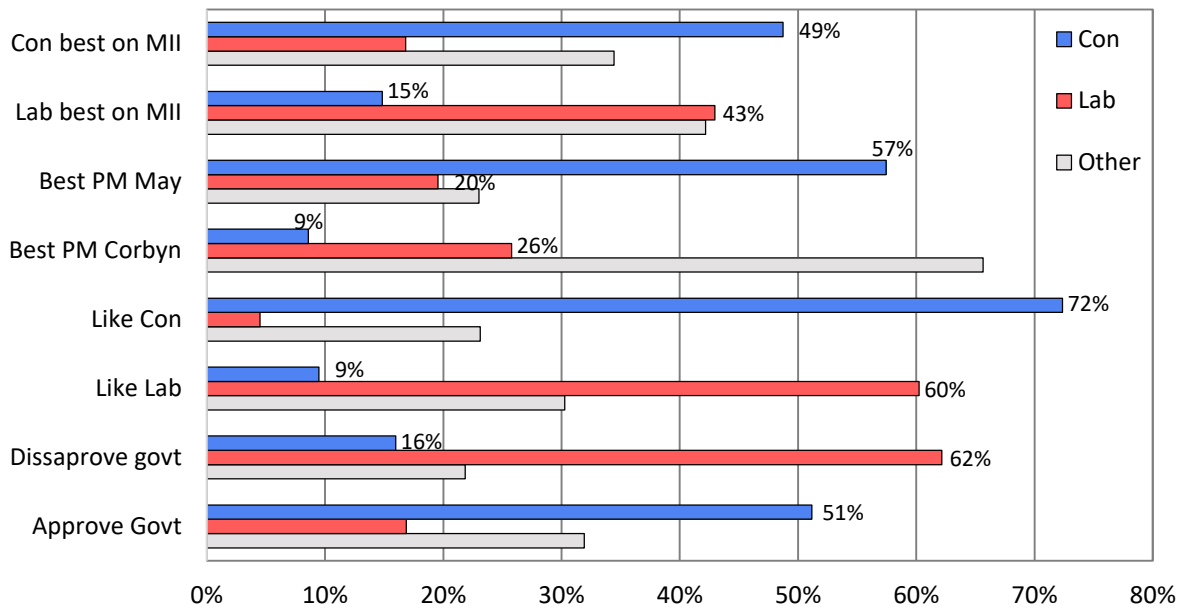|	Con	Lab	Other
Con best on MII	49%		
Lab best on MII	15%	43%	
Best PM May	57%	20%	
Best PM Corbyn	9%	26%	
Like Con	72%		
Like Lab	9%	60%	
Dissaprove govt	16%	62%	
Approve Govt	51%		

Figure 3.12: Voter perception parameters' effect upon the probability to choose one party over another. It shows the probability to vote for a party based on a given variable. For example, the first variable shows that when a voter approved of the government they were most likely to vote for the Conservative Party.

Overall:

The campaign clearly had a huge impact on the 2017 general election outcome. The campaign had a large impact upon the parties, and their leader's, ratings. As Labour's campaign was more moderate and higher in quality than many voters expected Labour's fortunes rose. On top of this, the manifesto released was received well and this appears to have shifted the momentum Labour's way. Conversely, at the same, time the Conservatives made blunders, especially in policy announcements like the dementia tax, subsequently, May's U-turns came across badly and with this their ratings declined. These coinciding changes in fortunes brought the parties' ratings closer together, and this helped to close the gap in voting intention between the two parties. Labour particularly received increased support from Remain groups, indicating new

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social and political divides greatly helped Labour quickly gain support in the election. This highlights the potential the electorate realigned in the 2017 election and this development also helped Labour to close the gap. Therefore, understanding the deeper reasons behind why certain sections of the electorate changed their perceptions of the two main parties is key to fully understanding why Labour was able to close a large deficit on the government in such a short time period. As mentioned earlier, these social and political divides are mirrored in the divides found in the EU referendum just a year previous. Therefore, this study of the 2017 election now goes on to analyse the effect Brexit may have had upon electoral behaviour.

Chapter 4: Europe, Brexit & the 2017 Election

In the time between the 2015 and 2017 elections, several developments occurred, but perhaps the most significant event was the decision the UK took to leave the European Union in the 2016 referendum. Interestingly, this was a new issue that had not been prominent in a UK election before, giving an element of the unknown on how this issue might affect voting intentions.

Earlier this book found that the EU and Brexit was the most commonly reported concern amongst the electorate going into, and during, the 2017 campaign. Therefore, this issue had the potential to greatly influence the outcome of this election. The Conservatives called this election with the intent of making it the Brexit election. The party focused on owning the Brexit issue by claiming they were the party best placed to negotiate with the EU and deliver Brexit. The Conservatives particularly focused their strategy around the leadership of PM May who was rising high in the opinion poll ratings. The party sought to use the electorate's faith in their leader to persuade the voters that they were the party best placed to secure a beneficial Brexit deal from the EU. In contrast, Labour was weary of talking about the issue and sought to change the narrative of the election into one that was more about investment in public services and improving public service provision. Their Brexit position maintained a commitment to Leave the EU, but to do so in a way that would keep ties to EU markets. Labour's position also pledged to end free movement and honour other aspects of the Vote.Leave campaign.

Therefore, although Labour's Brexit policy appeared contradictory at times they were deliberately placing themselves in the centre-ground of the debate. This could have been for party management reasons or this may have been a strategy deployed by the leadership team, either way, Labour hoped they could appeal to both sides of the divide and expand on the small base they had going into the election.

This chapter outlines opinion trends on Brexit and analyses how parties were perceived to perform on the issue. It shows how the Conservatives were perceived to be less able to handle this critical issue, especially amongst groups that drifted towards supporting Labour throughout the election campaign. These trends consistently outline how the EU divide increasingly may have shaped voting behaviour as the campaign developed. This crucially indicates as voters were forced to choose their best option on the Brexit issue the deep divisions that existed on the issue were laid bare. These divisions then latched onto the two main parties and caused a stalemate. Consequently, with hindsight, it can again be said that although the Conservatives had called the election to settle the issue of Brexit they in fact only prolonged the Brexit debate by allowing parliament to reflect how different parts of the country wanted very different things from the 2016 EU referendum result. Subsequently, this would only mean PM May would find it tougher to secure the Brexit deal she wanted and parliament would become deadlocked over the Brexit issue.

The chapter also highlights a value divide spread between contrasting socio-demographic groups. This value divide then may have divided these contrasting groups into supporting one of the two main parties. As these groups were roughly equal in size, during the campaign these factions split into roughly equal sizes of support for the two main parties. For instance, Remain leaning groups flowed towards Labour, whilst the Conservatives mostly kept their Leave base, of which they had secured before the election was announced. Therefore, this potentially

explains roughly equal support for both Labour and Conservative, thus potentially helping to explain the closer than expected election result. It also highlights how such value divides might be pushing different groupings into opposite political directions, consequently causing shifts in voting behaviour. Critically, this also indicates the possibility of an electoral realignment having occurred, or at least partially having emerged.

This chapter uses variables provided in the 2017 BES dataset that measured peoples' thoughts and feelings on Brexit. This chapter also produces models indicating that it was not the referendum result itself, but the potential effects of the government's Brexit plan that most influenced voting decisions. Therefore, the chapter overall highlights how important the Brexit divide was to the 2017 election result, and from this, how divides on the issue were beginning to re-shape British politics.

Voting Intention, the Remain and Leave divide:

Table: 4.1: Voting intention by Remain/Leave divide. BES 2017.

Party	Remain	Leave
Conservative	41.28%	58.72%
Labour	61.30%	38.70%

BES, W12.	Remain	Leave
AVG Con	41.66%	58.34%
Young Con	67.48%	32.52%
Middle Con	47.53%	52.47%
Older Con	34.03%	**65.97%**
AVG Lab	61.66%	38.34%
Young Lab	**86.06%**	13.94%
Middle Lab	63.70%	36.30%
Older Lab	51.24%	48.76%

Voting intention during the campaign was heavily linked to EU preferences, see table 4.1. Moreover, it noticeably correlated to how an individual had voted in the EU referendum just a year previous. Labour clearly attained more Remain votes, whilst the Conservatives received

more Leave support. Interestingly, this voting intention deepened within social categories. Younger voters who were inclined towards Labour overwhelmingly had backed Remain in the referendum. Conversely, older cohorts intending to vote Conservative were disproportionately Leave voters. This was the same with the qualification divide, where those with higher-level qualifications who had voted Remain were much more likely to think of backing Labour compared to the Tories, whereas those with fewer qualifications were more likely to consider backing the Conservatives. Therefore, whilst demographic divides appeared important in dividing the electorate it might have been Brexit that was dividing these demographics in a way that caused them to diverge between the two main parties. Crucially, this could signal that this election was starting to create a new divide around the Brexit issue, possibly signalling the prospect of wider political change in Britain, academically known as a realignment.

Conservative voting intention:

Table 4.2: Probability to vote Conservative by EU referendum vote.

BES 2017, W12	Remain	Leave
AVG Con	41.66%	58.34%
Low Probable Con	**70.02%**	29.98%
Middle Con	47.96%	52.04%
High Probable Con	34.60%	**65.40%**

The stated likelihood of an individual to vote for the Conservative Party by polling day did heavily correlate with a voter's 2016 EU referendum vote, see table 4.2. Towards the end of the campaign, the point where many undecided voters make their decision, the Conservatives gained a clear lead with those who stated they voted to Leave the EU in 2016. Moreover, this also correlated with how such voters perceived the parties, party leaders and their competence. Leave voters who intended to vote Conservative perceived the party, and their leader, to be much more likeable and competent than other options, especially on the biggest issues of the day, which undoubtedly included Brexit. Therefore, this would indicate the Conservative

Party's focus on owning the Brexit issue leading up to the campaign helped them greatly in securing the large leave voter base that enabled them to increase their vote share and stay as the largest party. Moreover, the large shift of undecided Leave voters over to the Conservatives towards the end of the campaign signals how crucial Brexit may have been in the 2017 election. Also, it indicates voters are now increasingly divided by the same divisions which fragmented the British electorate in the 2016 EU referendum.

Labour voting intention:

Perhaps the most interesting trend during the campaign was that of wavering and undecided Remain voters. On average these voters indicated they were not highly likely to back Labour, but they had not yet discounted Labour altogether. Vitally, in the latter half of the campaign more of these voters stated a very high likelihood of backing Labour, see figure 4.1. This would indicate that when individuals were forced to choose between the two main parties voters often came down on the side that most reflected how they had voted in the referendum. Again, this divide went further with Remain voters highly likely to back Labour being more likely to perceive Labour as the most credible option for government. Crucially, this again indicates that the Remain/ Leave divide was highly important in shaping the election result, with a large body of the disillusioned Remain base being sucked up by Labour. Importantly, this would indicate that Labour may have been able to rapidly close the gap in 2017 as the 2016 EU divide translated into party support and spread the vote evenly between the two main parties.

Figure 4.1: shows that Remain voters became much more likely to consider backing the Labour Party towards the end of the campaign, whilst Leave voters made up a lower proportion of Labour's new base. Crucially, although not all these Leave voters left Labour, Labour had such a large influx of Remain voters they very quickly became more reliant on Remain voters. Crucially, this could present future problems as these two groups will demand different things.

Figure 4.1 - 2016 referendum vote, By Labour voting intention - 2017 campaign
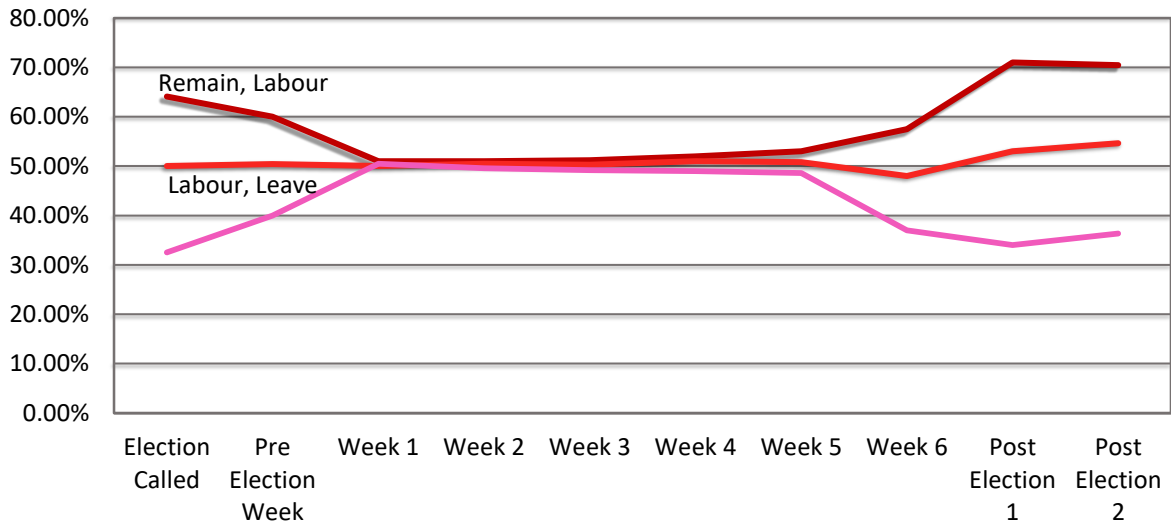
Brexit negotiations

Policy Priorities and the Brexit negotiations:

Table 4.3: Priority in Brexit negotiation by qualifications, Source: BES, 2017 W12.

Brexit priority:	Average	Low qualifications	Middle	High qualifications
Market Access	38.89%	14.94%	29.81%	58.67%
Middle	19.79%	20.47%	21.67%	16.31%
Migration Control	41.32%	43.83%	48.53%	25.02%

It is important to understand that not just the 2016 EU referendum voting divide affected the electorate in the 2017 election. Another factor the 2016 referendum brought was the decision to Leave, and with this, the need to figure out a settlement with the EU that could deliver this result. However, different groups of voters wanted different things from the Brexit negotiations. The average response to what voters prioritised from these negotiations indicated a fairly even split between those wanting to maintain EU market access and securing migration controls. However, younger, highly qualified Remain groups much more prioritised maintaining market access with the EU. Conversely, older, less qualified Leave-voting groups noticeably valued securing migration controls far more. Therefore, the divide about the UK's future relationship with the EU had the potential to fragment the electorate just as much as the 2016 EU referendum did.

Brexit priorities and voting Conservative:

Figure 4.2 demonstrates that the Conservative Party relied upon support from individuals who valued securing migration controls over gaining market access. From the beginning of the campaign, a large proportion of such voters indicated a high likelihood of voting for the Tories. Moreover, such voters perceived May and the Conservative Party to be more likeable and competent on the Brexit issue. Yet, across the campaign the Conservatives did lose some of these voters as some began to state a lower likelihood of voting Conservative, and as the campaign progressed Labour did better with a small proportion of these voters. This would indicate that Labour's vague position on Brexit may have enabled them to solidify their weakening Leave base, some of who considered backing the Tories at the start of the campaign. It also indicates the Conservative Party's poor campaign might have cost them trust on the vital Brexit issue, and from this may have cost them their majority.

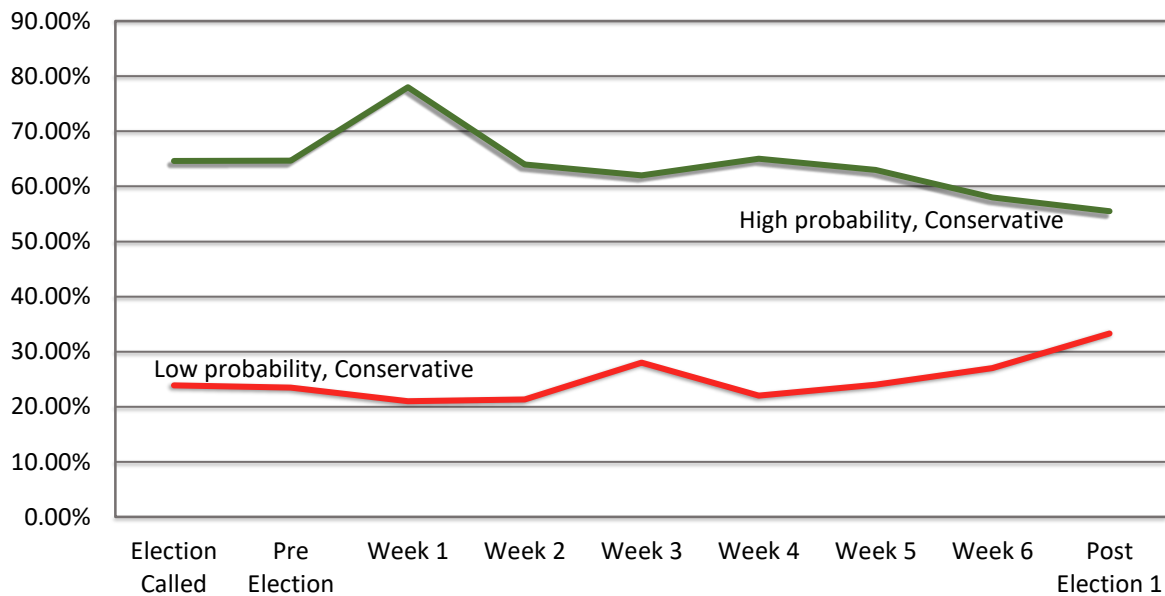Voters who prioritised securing migration controls in EU negotiations by probability to vote Con

Figure 4.2: Prioritising migration controls by the probability to vote Tory. It shows that the Conservatives dominated amongst voters who valued securing migration controls above maintaining EU market access in the forthcoming Brexit negotiations. However, towards the

end of the campaign, their lead narrowed slightly, displaying Labour's improved performance with leave voters.

Brexit priorities and voting Labour:

Labour was much more likely to gain votes from individuals who felt keeping EU market access was key in the coming EU negotiations, see figure 4.3. Voters who felt this way overwhelmingly stated a high probability of voting for Labour. Moreover, voters who felt they were very likely to back Labour and prioritised EU market access also perceived the Labour Party, and their leader, to be much more likeable and competent than the average voter. Moreover, these voters felt Conservatives were not able to perform on the key issues of the day more than the average voter, whilst also expressing more doubt in their leadership as well.

Crucially, this all indicates that Labour's vague softer Brexit position allowed them to suck up a fair amount of floating Remain voters who previously had backed 3rd parties like the SNP, Lib-Dems and the Green Party. Importantly, this rapid accumulation of Remain voters who had grown concerned about the economic consequences of leaving the single market clearly helped Labour close the polling gap and consequently produced an unexpected hung parliament.

Voters who prioritised keeping EU market access in EU negotiations by probability to vote Lab
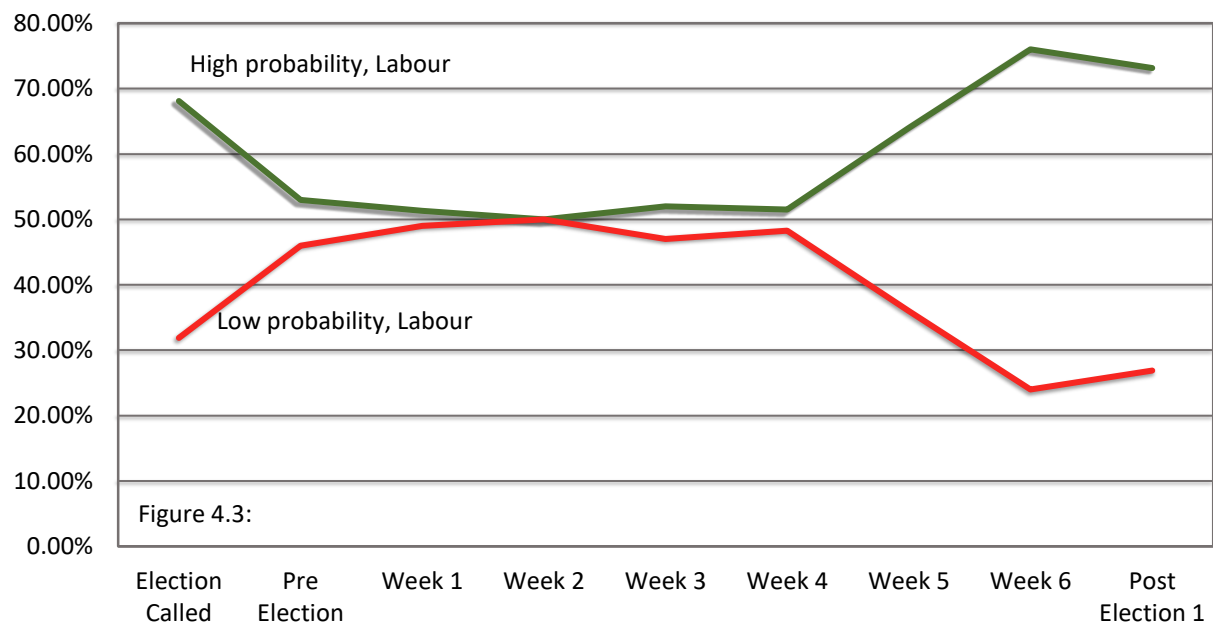

Figure 4.3:

Figure 4.3. Prioritising EU market access by the probability to vote Labour. This figure shows that Labour most likely gained support amongst Remain groups who favoured securing a free trade deal or maintaining single-market access, over gaining new migration controls.

Brexit priorities and trends for the two parties:

Importantly, the divides between what voters wanted out of Brexit did correlate with voting intention throughout the campaign, and consequently then went on to correlate with actual voting intention. Those who valued securing economic links over gaining new migration controls were much more likely to have voted for Labour than the Conservatives, see figure 4.4. Alternatively, those who thought migration controls should be the main policy to be gained from the coming Brexit negotiations voted Conservative far more often than Labour. Interestingly, this trend emerged during the last week of the campaign, indicating that the divide emerged once voters were forced to pick between two alternative Brexit options the two main parties were offering. This indicates that those who broke old party loyalties during the election only did so once choices surrounding Brexit compelled them to do so. Critically, as the Brexit issue will surely continue to dominate British politics these new unnatural coalitions might become stronger as the public continues to be divided over the issue, possibly signalling a realignment has emerged in British politics.

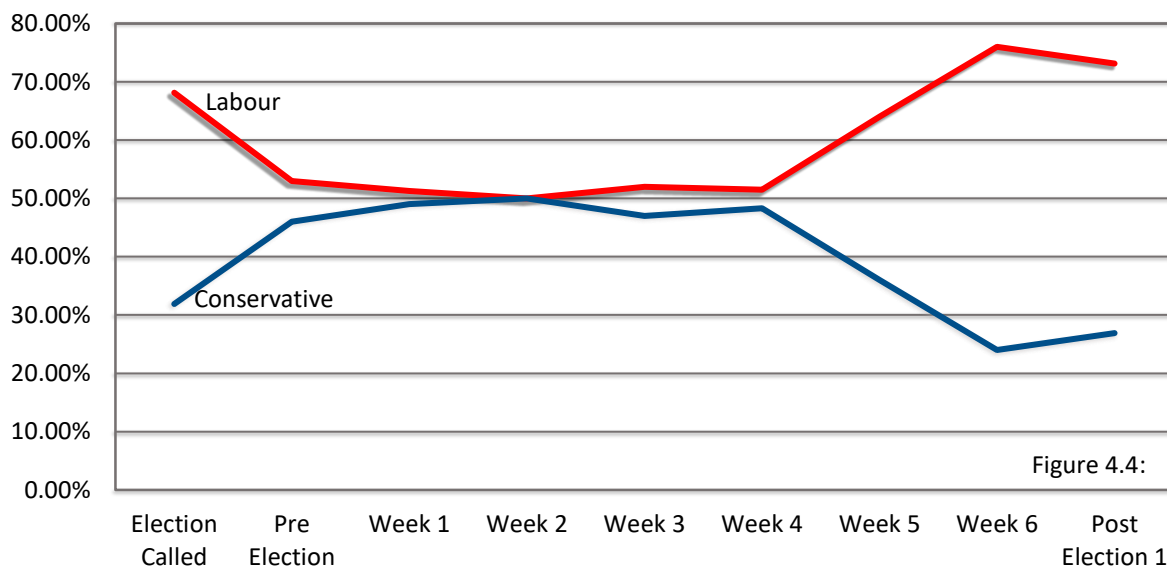Voters who prioritised keeping EU market access in EU negotiations by vote intention, 2017 GE

Figure 4.4:

Figure 4.4: Voters who most want to secure EU market access by vote intention. It displays how the divide around Brexit negotiation preferences did heavily correlate between voting patterns, for instance, those who valued keeping EU market access heavily backed Labour.

Government's perceived performance in the Brexit negotiations

Table 4.4: government's handling of EU negotiations by party support.

Government handling EU Negotiations	Conservative	Labour
Badly	33.85%	66.15%
Neither	58.77%	41.23%
Fairly Well	64.87%	35.13%

A majority of voters at the start of the election felt the government was doing a good job in handling the Brexit process, see table 4.4. However, as the campaign progressed the government was seen to be struggling to perform on the Brexit issue, with more voters stating the government was doing a bad job with the Brexit negotiations. Figure 4.5 shows the proportion of voters stating the government was conducting the negotiations competently fell amongst all voters intending to vote for one of the main parties. The decline was particularly steep amongst those who had a voting intention of Conservative at the start of the campaign. This indicates that as the government slipped up during the campaign it may have caused the voters to perceive the government as unable to handle the Brexit negotiations and carry through its vision of Brexit. Therefore, it would appear that the election may have damaged the public's faith in the Conservative Party's ability to handle the most important issue of the day, potentially negatively affecting their ability to win votes. Moreover, the harder version of Brexit the government promoted during the campaign could have alienated individuals with a weak Conservative voting intention, potentially causing a few of these voters to opt for Labour instead. Therefore, the government's strategy on Brexit and lack of awareness of how weak their new voting base was may have shaped the election result.

Further, views on how the government were performing on the Brexit issue during the campaign correlated heavily with political groupings. The Conservatives were deemed to be incompetent by younger, more qualified remain groups. Alternatively, older, less qualified leave groups still mostly backed the government. As this also correlated with voting intention this new divide signals the possibility of a realignment having emerged.
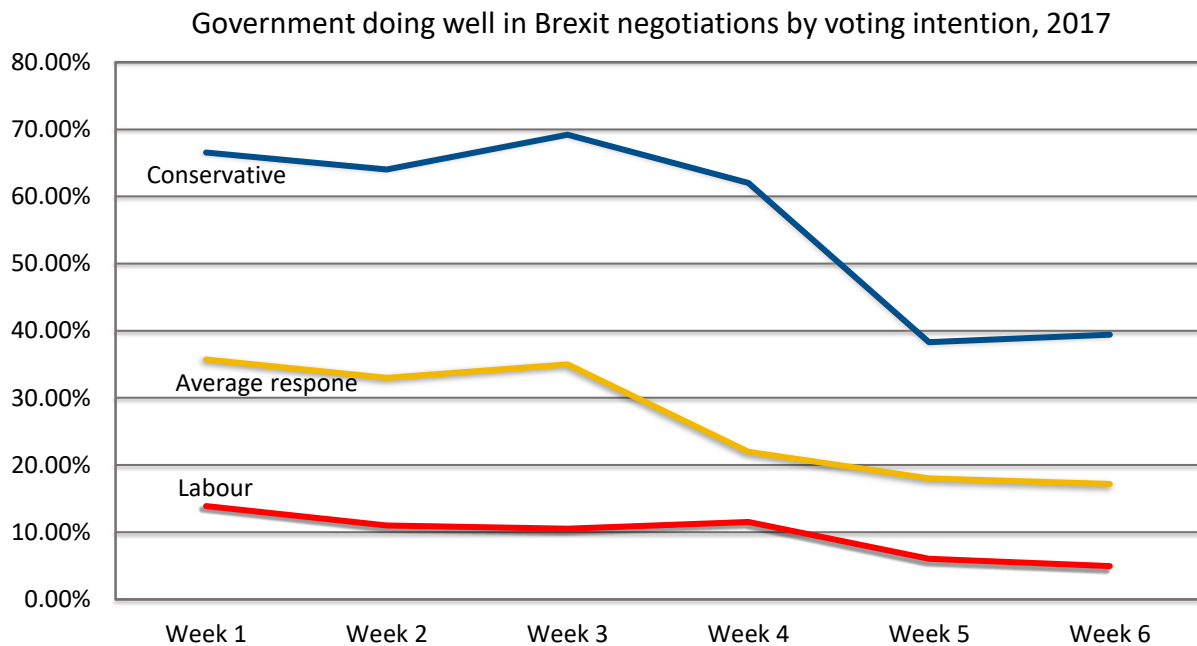

Figure 4.5: View on the government's Brexit talks. It shows trust in the government's perceived ability to handle the Brexit negotiations declined rapidly during the campaign, especially amongst voters who had a weak voting intention of Conservative at the start of the campaign.

The perceived consequences of Brexit:

Perceptions of what could be gained from the Brexit negotiations:

Single market access requires: continue paying EU and accepting free movement?

The division around Brexit again grew once voters acknowledged that the Brexit negotiations would force a policy trade-off decision. This policy decision required voters to choose between securing immigration controls or maintaining single market access in the coming EU

negotiations. The choice a voter would make on this issue would mean a voter would be more likely to want to either fully leave the EU's single market or remain within this market sphere. This is because the only way to eliminate free movement would be to leave the single market as membership requires payment and accepting the migration flows that stem from it.

Crucially, divisions around these choices mirror the Brexit divide. Younger more qualified groupings, who mostly backed remain, tended to want to keep market ties, accepted free movement and the UK's financial obligations to the EU. Figure 4.6 highlights such groups mostly backed Labour, with those most concerned about securing market access drifting towards Labour in the election, especially when isolating specific demographics. It also shows that these groups were prepared to accept a Labour government and the policy trade-off of higher immigration in order to achieve this Brexit outcome.

Alternatively, the Conservatives tended to do better with groups who did not accept that market access would require accepting free migration flows. This indicates those who thought Brexit could achieve greater migration controls, whilst at the same time securing some form of free trade agreement, backed the Conservatives. It also highlights those who most thought a harder form of Brexit could be accomplished with limited damage backed May's vision of Brexit over Labour's. Moreover, these voters were prepared to lose economic access if it meant securing migration controls, again indicating those who most valued securing migration reforms were the individuals most likely to stick with the government during the campaign.

Importantly, voters who valued securing migration, and understood it meant leaving the single market, tended to possess fewer qualifications, be older and to have voted Leave in 2016, the opposite social make-up to Labour's grouping. This indicates that groups wanting different policy outcomes from the Brexit negotiations tended to back the two different parties at very noticeable rates. From this divide, the two-party system re-emerged, with those valuing

economic openness backing Labour and those prepared to cut economic ties in order to secure migration controls voting Conservative. Crucially, this raises the potential different groups with different policy goals around Brexit latched themselves onto these two parties, which in turn produced roughly equally sized groups backing rival parties. Therefore, this value divide, which was carried on from the 2016 EU referendum, may have been a large factor in creating the hung parliament election result.
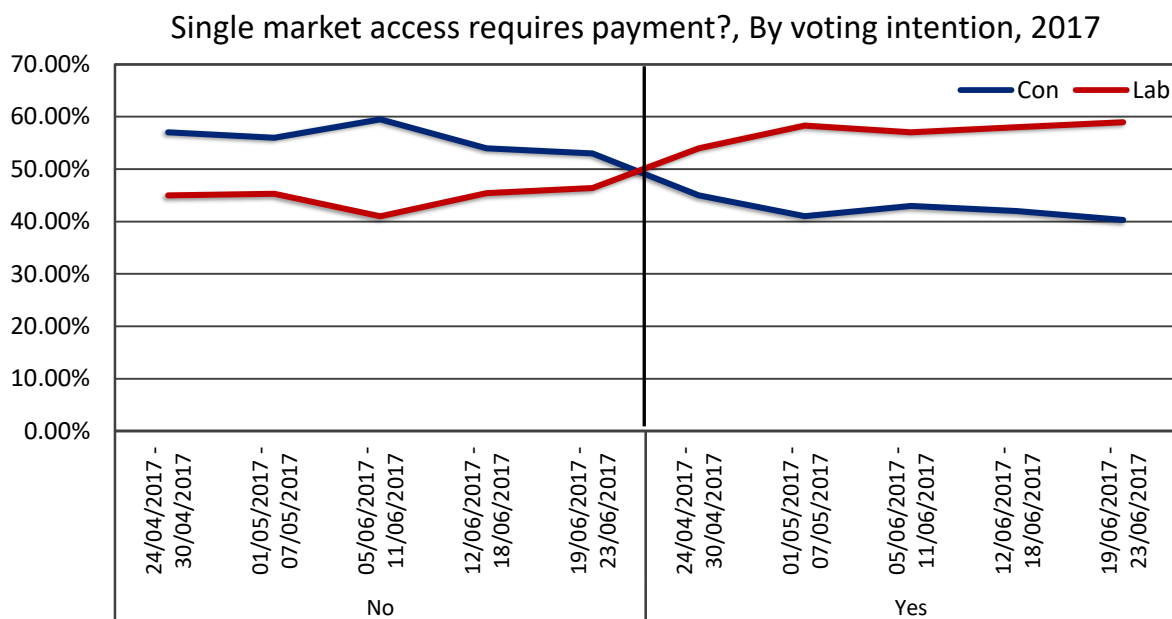

Figure 4.6: View on single market access payments by voting intention. It shows that Labour voters accepted single market access required accepting paying into the EU. Conservative voters instead believed the UK could leave, not have to pay in and avoid migration flows.

The effects of leaving the Brexit on:

Effects of leaving EU on: general economic situation in the UK, by voting intention?

Party	Economy Worse	Same	Economy Better
Conservative	9.00%	71.36%	19.65%
Labour	53.35%	36.71%	9.94%
Average	31.95%	53.43%	14.62%

Table 4.5: Expected impact of Brexit on the economy, 2017 BES, W12.

Brexit continued its divide in terms of the general perceptions voters had on what the likely consequences of any Brexit deal would be.

Firstly, looking at perceptions of how a Brexit deal may affect the general economic situation in the UK it can be said there was a clear Brexit divide. There was roughly a third of voters who believed that any Brexit deal would leave the UK worse off, half of the electorate thought things would not change and only 15% thought any Brexit deal would improve the UK economy. Those who felt things would be worse tended to back the Labour Party throughout the campaign at a much higher level than the Conservative Party. Meanwhile, those who thought things would not deteriorate, and might even improve the UK economy, tended to drift to the Conservatives, see table 4.5. Therefore, this correlation indicates that during the campaign voters who felt more negatively about Brexit tended to back Labour, whilst those more optimistic, or neutral, about Brexit tended to back the government's Brexit policy.

Crucially, these views correlated with perceptions of the parties and their respective leaders as well. Individuals who most feared Brexit's economic impact believed Labour to be the more likeable and competent party. Moreover, Corbyn was seen to be a better leader than May amongst these voters. Conversely, those who had a more optimistic view of Brexit's economic impact clearly felt the Conservative Party performed best on the biggest issues of the day and believed the Tory Party leadership to be more competent. Significantly, those who believed Brexit's impact to be harmful correlated heavily with the 2016 EU divide, where younger people with more qualifications believed Brexit's impact to be bad and contrasting groups still believed Brexit to be beneficial. This again indicates how the 2016 EU referendum divide was now dividing voting patterns between the two main parties. The winning side, still optimistic about Brexit, had flowed toward the Conservative Party, meanwhile those on the losing side, still fearful of Brexit's impact, drifted towards the Labour Party throughout the campaign.

Effects of leaving EU on: my personal financial situation and Economy Situation?

Table 4.6: Expected impact of Brexit on an individual's personal finances, BES, 2017.

Party support	Worse finances	Same	Better finances
Conservative	23.00%	42.97%	34.03%
Labour	64.19%	24.76%	11.05%

Interestingly, the same findings were replicated when a voter was asked about how they thought Brexit would affect their personal finances, rather than the effect on the wider economy, see table 4.6. Again, those fearful of how it would affect their bank balance more often backed Labour, whilst those less pessimistic about Brexit generally stuck with the Conservatives throughout the campaign. Moreover, voters who still thought Brexit would bring economic payoffs for them as an individual trusted the Tories more than Labour on the Brexit issue.

Trade Affects view after leaving the EU?

Table 4.7: Expected impact of Brexit on international trade flows into the UK, 2017.

Brexit Trade Post- Brexit	Lower trade flows	No Change	Higher trade flows
Conservative	17.31%	38.15%	44.54%
Labour	52.42%	30.60%	16.98%

Table 4.7 shows the expected impact upon trade flows also generated the same Brexit divide. Individuals who felt that Brexit would enable the UK to expand trading relationships beyond Europe were more likely to look upon the Conservative Party favourably, perceived their leader to be the best candidate for the job of PM and had a voting intention of Tory throughout the campaign. Labour on the other hand enjoyed much more success than the Conservative Party amongst those who felt trading would be damaged by the Brexit process. These voters perceived the Labour Party to be more competent on the Brexit issue, felt their leader was

more likable and in the final weeks of the election stated a higher likelihood of backing Labour, see figure 4.7. Therefore, it can again be seen how the divides around Brexit shaped the election result.
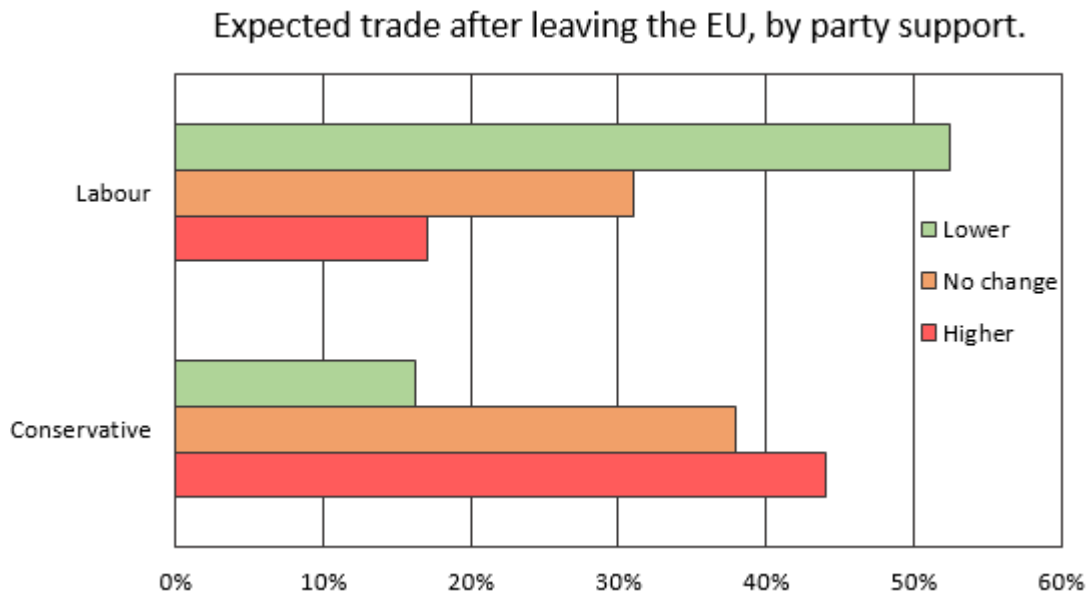

Figure 4.7. The expected impact of Brexit on trade by party support. This output shows that those who thought UK trade would be lower post-Brexit supported Labour more than the Tories, whilst those who were optimistic about post-Brexit trade backed the Conservatives.

Effects of leaving EU on: NHS?

Further, the Brexit effect also carried into concerns surrounding public services. One such example of this was with the NHS, where those who felt Brexit's impact would damage public services drifted towards Labour during the campaign. Meanwhile, those who thought the EU negotiations would result in the UK having more money to spend on services, like the NHS, mostly stayed with the Tories throughout the campaign. These voters also perceived the Conservatives to be the more competent party on the Brexit issue and preferred PM May over opposition leader Corbyn. Those who thought Brexit was going to damage the NHS had the opposite political perceptions.

Crucially, this indicates that the Conservative Party's promotion of a hard Brexit policy during the campaign might have hurt their election chances as it unnerved wavering Conservative voters who were fearful of Brexit's impact, especially a very hard-Brexit's impact. Moreover, Labour's vague soft Brexit approach likely helped win these voters over as individuals concerned with Brexit's potential impact could feel at ease knowing that the changes this form of Brexit could bring would likely be minimal and not that damaging.

Effects of Brexit on foreign issues:

UK international influence after leaving the EU?

Table 4.8: Expected impact of Brexit on UK international influence, 2017 BES, W12.

Party support	Less international influence	No Change	More international influence
Conservative	21.14%	50.55%	28.31%
Labour	60.33%	30.20%	9.47%
Average	41.58%	39.93%	18.49%

Table 4.8 shows the potential effects of Brexit on UK international influence also created similar divisions. Groups who had backed Brexit perceived UK international influence only to be enhanced post-Brexit negotiations. Moreover, these groups did not think securing migration controls would reduce the UK's political influence. This faction very clearly backed the Conservative Party during the campaign and also perceived the Conservatives to be the most competent option on the issue of Brexit. They also rated the Conservative Party, and its leader, more highly than Labour and the leadership it provided. Conversely, those who felt Brexit would harm UK influence backed Labour more often and tended to perceive Labour as the more credible option. Importantly, this again shows how Brexit divided the voters between the two main parties, where those who instinctively responded negatively towards Brexit impact questions heavily gravitated towards Labour during the campaign and those who naturally responded positively tended to back the Conservative Party.

<u>Expected Change in Migration Levels?</u>

Finally, the Brexit divide was also displayed around voters' expectations of how migration levels would change post-Brexit. Those who had voted for Brexit and expected migration levels to dip after the negotiations had been completed were much more likely to view the Conservatives as the best party to handle the Brexit negotiations. Moreover, they were more likely to highly rate the party and perceive May to be a more competent leader on the Brexit issue than Corbyn. Further, such voters were also more likely to state the Conservative Party were the ablest party to handle their most immediate concerns, regardless of the type of issue they had as their top priority.

Alternatively, the Remain faction, who appeared to prioritise the securing of future trade market access over new migration controls, tended to think Brexit would not bring a noticeable change to migration levels. Indeed, some thought it could lead to higher levels of international migration. Therefore, not only did they not demand migration controls as much as the opposing group, but they also doubted Brexit's capacity to deliver change to the UK's migration policy. Interestingly, this faction took the opposite view and perceived Labour to be more credible on the Brexit issue and felt that the leadership it provided was of a higher quality than compared to the leadership the Tories offered. Crucially, these trends again indicate those most optimistic about Brexit tended to back the Conservatives throughout the campaign, despite their perceived poor performance, whilst those who feared Brexit's impacts drifted to Labour in a bid to soften Brexit's blow.

All these concerns surrounding Brexit are important as when a voter perceived the government to be offering a hard version of Brexit they would have feared this policy's impact on a wider set of issues, such as the economy, public services and immigration. This could have led many wavering voters to distrust the government's competence on the biggest issue of the day,

Brexit, and consequently, this could have given Labour an easier time in gaining support and closing their large deficit to the government. Crucially, this could have helped form the shock hung parliament result.

Moreover, all these findings again signal the gradual emergence of a realignment, where the hopes and fears expressed in the 2016 EU referendum carried on through the 2017 election and shaped voting patterns. Individuals who hoped Brexit would bring the changes they were looking for increasingly backed the Conservatives, whereas those who feared a hard Brexit, and any form of Brexit, tended to back the Labour Party, see figure 4.8. Therefore, the socio-political divides displayed in the referendum just a year earlier may have gone onto shape the 2017 election result.
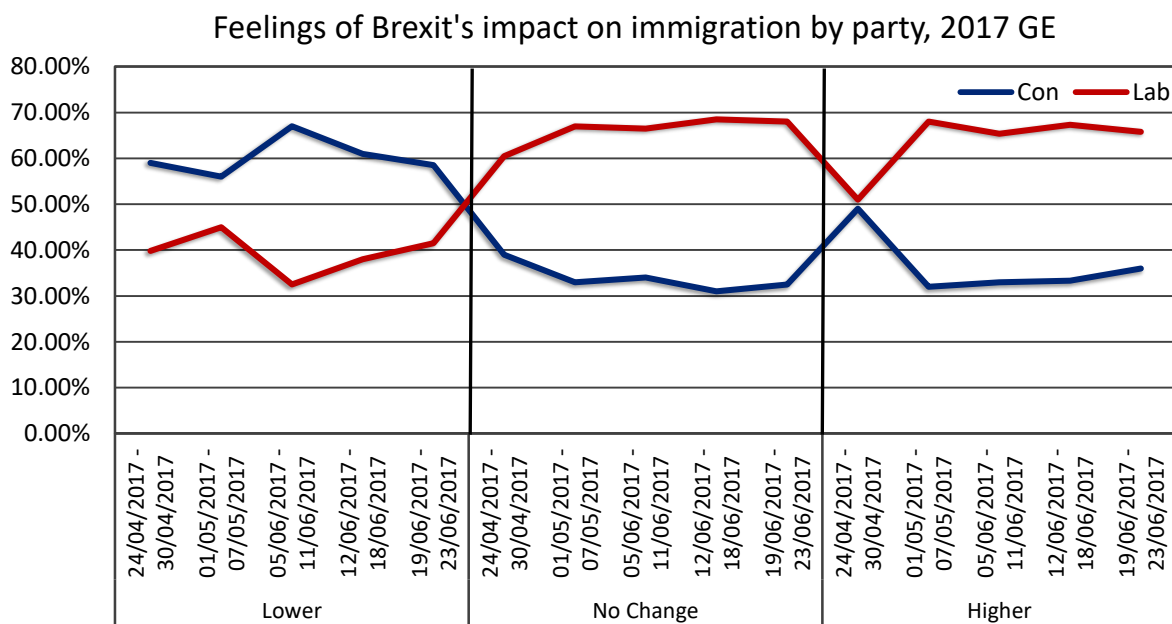
Figure 4.8: Feelings of Brexit's impact on immigration flows by the party an individual would vote for. Source: BES 2017. It displays how those who thought that Brexit would lower migration backed the Conservatives throughout the campaign, despite Labour's improved performance. Alternatively, those who thought it would have no useful effect on migration policy backed Labour.

The probability the EU/Brexit issue impacted upon voter's polling day vote.

Model 4.1: A linear model estimating a voter's stated probability to vote Conservative and Labour.

Dependent variable:	Probability to vote for:	
Linear Regression	Con (1)	Lab (2)
EU_Referendum vote_Leave	0.602***	-0.144
	(0.091)	(0.101)
EU_Referendum vote_Remain	-0.741***	0.083
	(0.088)	(0.097)
EU_SideLeave Side	0.903	-0.037
	(0.602)	(0.667)
EU_SideRemain Side	-0.284	0.294
	(0.533)	(0.590)
Negotiation priority_Migration controls	0.417***	-0.125**
	(0.057)	(0.062)
Negotiation priority_Middle	0.072	0.114*
	(0.060)	(0.065)
Negotiation priority_Trade Access	-0.354***	0.166**
	(0.059)	(0.064)
Government Handle EU Negotiations	1.720***	-1.039***
	(0.027)	(0.029)
Brexit_expect trade Access	0.032	-0.278***
	(0.065)	(0.071)
Brexit_effects on EU Trade	0.288***	-0.234***
	(0.034)	(0.038)
Effects_effects on EU Immigration	-0.208***	0.265***
	(0.036)	(0.040)
Brexit_ effects on Terrorism	-0.109***	0.030
	(0.036)	(0.040)
Brexit_ effects International Voice	0.155***	-0.239***
	(0.039)	(0.043)
Brexit_ effects on Economy	0.261***	-0.248***
	(0.043)	(0.047)
Brexit_ effects on NHS	0.486***	-0.376***
	(0.039)	(0.042)
Constant	-2.284***	9.811***

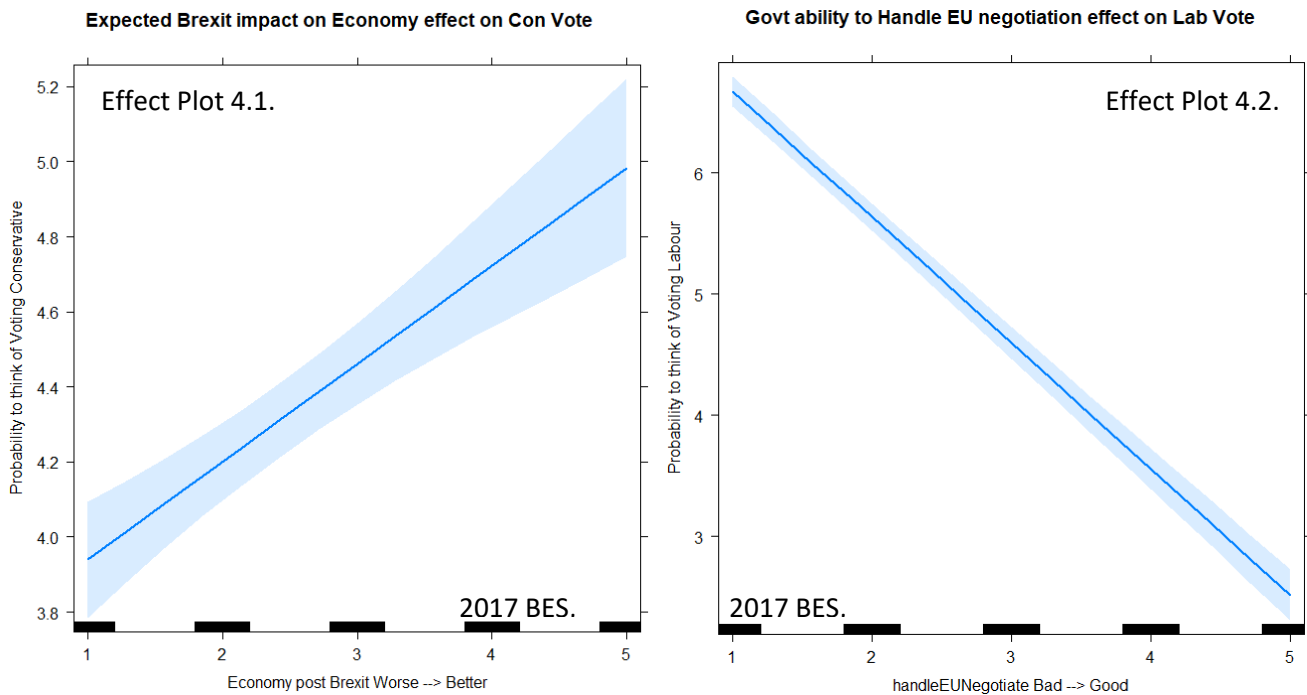|	(0.205)	(0.224)
Observations	16,536	16,536
Adjusted R^2	0.459	0.296
Residual Std. Error	3.067 (df = 16524)	3.359 (df = 16518)
Note On Significance:	*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01	

Analysis of the linear regression analysis:

Model 4.1 displays how 2016 EU referendum voting patterns partly shaped the 2017 election result. Remain and Leave was significant for the Conservative vote, but not for the Labour vote, indicating the binary voting patterns of the EU referendum did not totally translate into a new two-party system. In other words, there were Remain voters for Labour, but also many Leave voters too. On top of this, how people responded to questions prompting Remain & Leave identity, along with how an individual would vote in another referendum, did not seem to be significant in either of the two main party's vote. There was some significance in identity, but this was marginal compared to other factors. The main factors that appear most significant in model 4.1 are how voters saw the party's EU negotiation strategy, how much they agreed with this strategy and the extent they believed the party could deliver on this. This is shown with the ability to handle EU negotiations and the EU priority variable being the most significant effect on the party's respective vote shares. Model 4.1 also captures how voters felt about the EU negotiations and the possible effects from them, which tended to highlight quite significant effects on the party's respective vote share.

This all suggests that it was not Brexit itself that was causing shifts in voting patterns, but rather the factors that influenced Brexit appear to be influencing voting patterns the most. For example, those who feel Britain could be more prosperous out of the EU and wanted migration controls were more likely to consider voting for the Conservative Party. Alternatively, those

who feared the effects of isolation and preferred maintaining EU market ties backed Labour more often. Therefore, rather than the Remain vs Leave divide driving trends, it could instead be a culturally Liberal vs culturally conservative cleavage divide shaping voting behaviour. Therefore, perceptions around Brexit alongside hopes and fears surrounding the coming EU negotiations were likely the main driving forces in voting intentions throughout the campaign. For example, the culturally Liberal vs culturally conservative divide may have impacted upon perceptions of how the respective two main parties were able to handle the coming EU negotiations, and from this may have shaped likely voting patterns. Model 4.1 shows that perceptions on handling the EU negotiations were important in determining voting patterns, so if these views guided voters into different camps on how well they thought the party could handle the negotiations then this might explain why voters changed their voting intention greatly during the campaign. Critically, as highlighted earlier there were correlations between such views and perceptions of the parties' competence on Brexit, indicating this new cleavage divide was remoulding the electorate between the two main parties.

Significantly, it appears the culturally liberal vs culturally conservative divide might have impacted on what voters wanted out of the negotiations, and consequently what party was best to deliver this. Those that were more likely to prefer keeping the UK closer to the EU market, in order to maintain trade links, were people who tended to be more culturally liberal and were more likely to state they would vote Labour than Conservative at a statistically significant level. Moreover, this appears to increase the Labour share of the vote, whilst decreasing the Conservative share of the vote. Therefore, Labour's ability to pick up culturally Liberal voters during the general election probably helped them close the gap on the government and produce the shock hung parliament result. Alternatively, the Conservative Party's reliance on culturally conservative voters, and their inability to expand beyond this base, likely limited their appeal and their ability to maintain their majority.

Expected Brexit impact on Economy effect on Con Vote

Govt ability to Handle EU negotiation effect on Lab Vote

Effect Plot 4.1.

Effect Plot 4.2.

2017 BES.

2017 BES.

Probability to think of Voting Conservative

Probability to think of Voting Labour

Economy post Brexit Worse --> Better

handleEUNegotiate Bad --> Good

Effect 4.1 shows how the Conservatives gained support when they felt Brexit would improve the UK economy. Effect plot 4.2 displays how Labour gained when voters felt the government was handling the negotiations poorly. Source: BES 2017.

On the other hand, voters who preferred securing migration controls displayed contrasting voting behaviour, with those wanting migration controls were much more likely to vote Conservative at the expense of other parties. This highlights how voters who tended to be more culturally conservative were significantly more likely to increase the Conservative Party vote, whilst decreasing the possibility of Labour being able to win votes and overtake the governing party. Therefore, this shows how divides regarding how to conduct the EU negotiations might have translated into a new two-party voting divide, of which had not been seen for some decades in British politics. Therefore, divides around opinions of the future of the UK might have caused the closer than expected election result.

Also, it appears that voters have made a conscious choice regarding the trade-offs between free movement and trade access. Conservative voters, who were mostly aware leaving meant a

disconnection of free trade in order to secure migration controls, were statistically more significant to vote Conservative, whilst they were less likely to think of voting Labour. In contrast, voters who preferred securing market access tended to be aware this meant sacrificing sovereignty, particularly over migration controls, in order to maintain access. Again, these voters appear to have made a conscious choice to make such a trade-off, with these voters being more likely to back Labour at a statistically significant level, whilst at the same time they decreased the ability for the Tories to gain votes.

These divides were not just limited to immigration and trade preferences, they were also reflected at a statistically significant level when analysing people's hopes and fears regarding the possible effects of Brexit. For example, voters who felt that leaving the EU would hurt Britain's voice in the world tended to back Labour at a statistically significant level, whilst those that thought it could be good for the country's international influence backed the Conservative Party. Moreover, those who felt it would negatively impact the UK economy backed Labour and increased their share of the vote significantly, whilst those who believed it could be an opportunity to improve the UK economy improved the Conservative Party vote share (see effect plot 4.1). Finally, those who thought Brexit would impact negatively on public services, especially the NHS, tended to back Labour, whilst other voters who took a different view mostly drifted towards the Conservative Party at a statistically significant level.

Importantly, all this suggests that how well rated the parties were during the campaign, along with how competent they were perceived to be, likely were impacted by views surrounding the potential consequences of specific Brexit options. Therefore, rather than reflecting the 2016 referendum voting divide the 2017 election result might have instead reflected an individual's view on what Brexit should be, and from this, their hopes, or fears, of what Brexit would bring the country. Consequently, it can be argued the 2017 election reflected the new culturally

liberal vs cultural conservative cleavage divide more than just the 2016 referendum result, indicating a wider divide may now be shaping the UK electorate. Therefore, the divide in perceptions around Brexit might have caused the divide that brought the UK back to a two-party system, thus forging a realignment, however brief it may prove to be.

<u>Multi-nominal - Probability of choosing to vote for Labour and Conservative compared to other alternatives and views on Europe.</u>

The multi-nominal regression analysis, figure 4.9, tends to show similar results to that of the linear regression analysis displayed earlier, model 4.1. People who thought Brexit would bring stronger immigration controls, especially when they demanded such a policy be implemented, were much more likely to choose the Conservative Party over any of the other parties. Those who were less concerned about migration controls, and thought Brexit would make no difference to the UK's ability to control migration, were much more likely to back Labour over Conservative at a statistically significant level. A similar pattern followed regarding how people perceived Brexit would affect the UK economy. Those who were more negative about what Brexit had in store for the UK economy tended to be more likely to choose Labour over Conservative, with those who felt more positive in all likelihood chose to vote Conservative over Labour.

Figure 4.9 also shows how perceptions of a harder version of Brexit and how it might impact the UK likely hurt the Conservative Party's ability to maintain its overall majority. Those that thought a harder version of Brexit was a good thing for the UK tended to choose, at a statistically significant level, the Conservative Party over the Labour Party. Those who less favoured the Conservative Party's approach to the EU negations tended to choose Labour over the Conservative Party, again at a highly statistically significant level. This indicates that this trend was not due to chance alone and that different priorities on Brexit, and different

perceptions of how these different forms of Brexit would affect the UK, were part of the reason behind why voters chose one party over another. Moreover, the party deemed most able to handle the Brexit negotiations, something likely impacted by a party's Brexit policy, greatly affected the likelihood to choose one of the main parties over other options. This indicates the closer than expected election result may have been because of these divides around the future of Brexit, of which produced two roughly equally sized groups within the UK electorate, which in turn latched onto the old two-party system and created a shock hung-parliament scenario.

EU/Brexit variables & the probability of voting for a main party
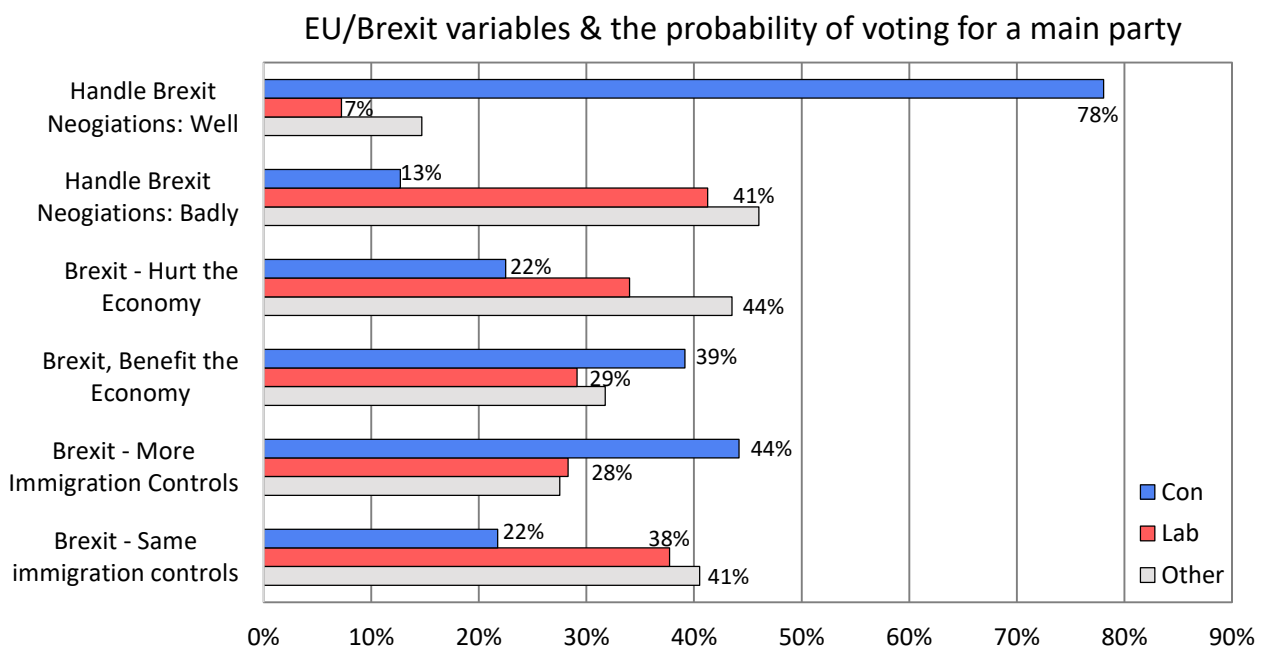
Figure 4.9: Results of the multi-nominal model estimating Brexit variable's impact on the probability to vote for a given party over the other options available. Source: BES 2017.

The overall impact of the EU issue on the 2017 election:

Overall, the EU factor was a huge unknown factor going into the 2017 election, and its impact was even bigger. The Brexit issue clearly helped Labour and did not appear to make it easy for the government to keep its large polling lead. Labour appears to have sucked up voters who had grown disillusioned with the government's hard Brexit position, therefore the Labour

option was the choice many of these voters made as Labour became the party to stop the government's hard Brexit. Voters who feared that a hard Brexit would damage the UK economy, international influence, trade and public services quickly began to perceive Labour as the more credible option, and consequently towards the end of the campaign flocked to support the Labour Party. Moreover, statistical modelling in this chapter has shown that as Labour became to be seen as the best-performing party on this issue they were increasingly likely to pick up these voters, whilst the Conservatives became less likely to do so. As a result, Labour was able to amass a larger than expected voter base, making it possible for Labour to close the gap on the government, which in part contributed to the shock hung-parliament result.

Further to this, the Conservatives also were perceived to have slipped up during the campaign, especially on key policy announcements, of which Brexit would have featured. As this occurred and the campaign progressed, the Conservative Party's large lead on Brexit competence declined, with even their supporters showing noticeable signs of concerns regarding their ability to handle the Brexit negotiations. This development was incredibly important as being seen to perform best on the biggest issues of the day, especially on the Brexit issue, was a major factor that increased Conservative support. Therefore, as the proportion of voters who believed the party could be most trusted with this vital issue decreased so too did the size of the positive effect on their vote share. This limited their gains, and even possibly resulted in losses, at the same time Labour was maximising their opposition to the government vote. Therefore, as Labour gained from the Brexit issue the Conservatives likely lost from it, thus producing a narrowing of the polls, and in the end producing a surprisingly close election result.

Therefore, in hindsight the Conservatives calling the election based on the single issue of Brexit was unwise. This was mainly because the Brexit issue is not a zero-sum game, where one party gains at the expense of the other, like economic effects have historically produced. Due to the

wider divisions around Brexit, the Conservatives being seen as the party who clearly owned the delivery of Brexit became a problem for them, especially as Labour developed a much vaguer and softer position compared to their hard position. This enabled Labour to unify the opposition who feared the impact of a hard Brexit, which according to model 4.1 gave Labour a huge boost of support in the election. Consequently, Labour gained amongst specific socio-political groupings, who mostly represented remain voters. Labour's vague stance on the Brexit issue meant they also kept enough leave voters, some of whom just wanted a Brexit policy of some sort to be implemented, onside to reduce their deficit to the government to almost zero.

Therefore, the translation of this Brexit divide into voting patterns caused roughly equal sizes of support to be evenly distributed between the two main parties. Yes, the Conservatives gained many leave voters, but they had already secured most of this vote before the campaign started. Labour on the other hand was awarded the other side of the new divide, whilst also securing wavering leave voters who indicated a weak voting intention of Tory at the start of the campaign. As a result, this very quickly and unexpectedly brought the two parties closer together and was partly a factor in why the hung-parliament result was able to occur. Significantly, as these divides were consistent across a range of variables explored in this chapter it indicates that a wider value divide amongst these groups may have emerged and that British politics may now be driven by a realignment, of which is based amongst a new cleavage divide of cultural liberalism vs cultural conservatism. If this is correct, this may raise the potential for further changes in the two main parties' voting base, and with this create a new two-party system, showing how the 2017 election result could represent a very significant turning point in British politics.
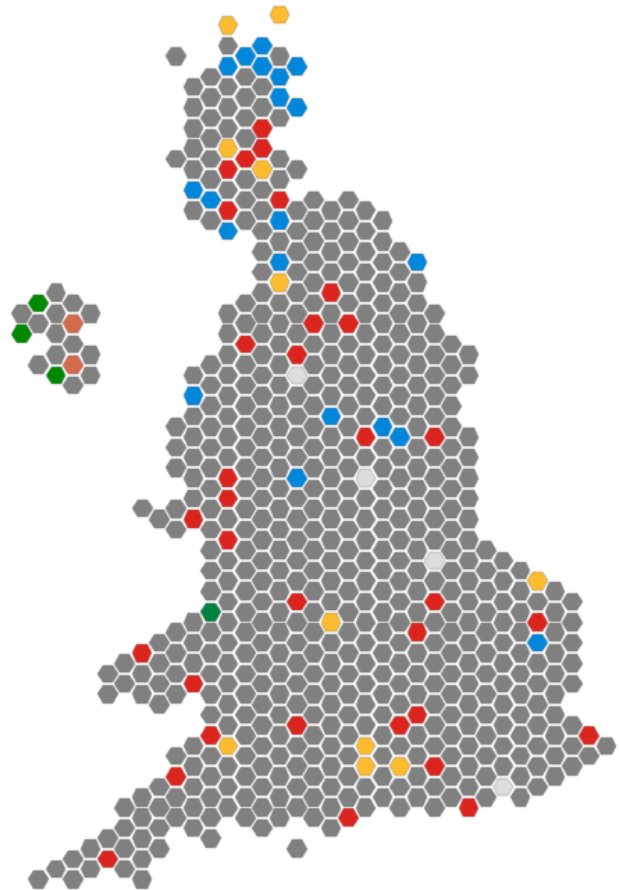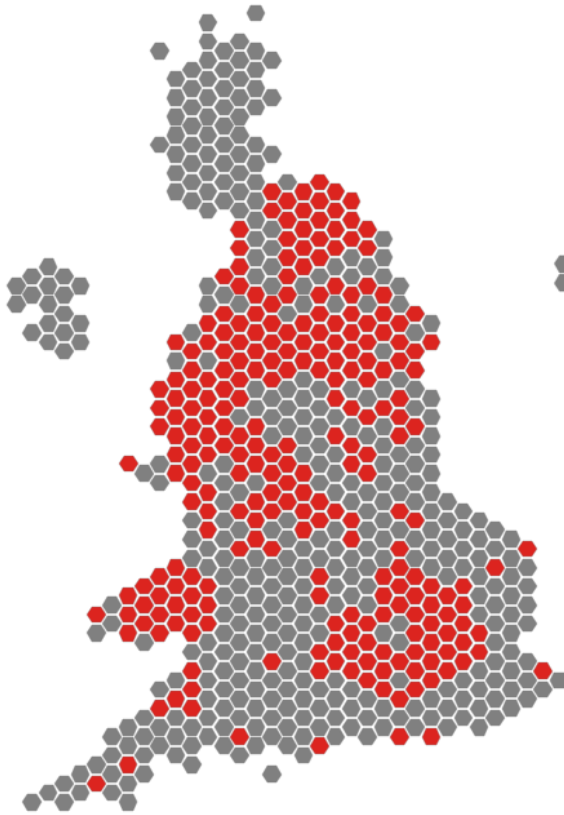
Appendix – Maps

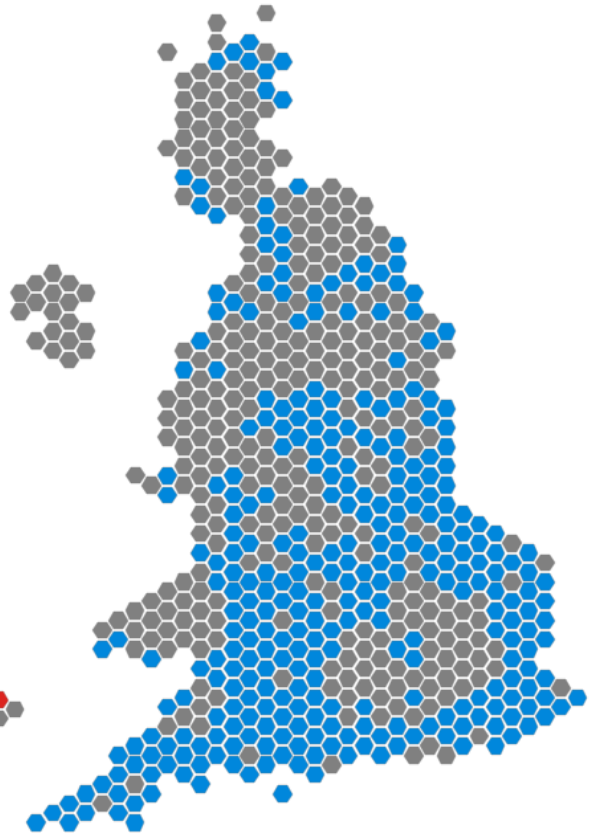# showing electoral change

The 2017 Election Result.
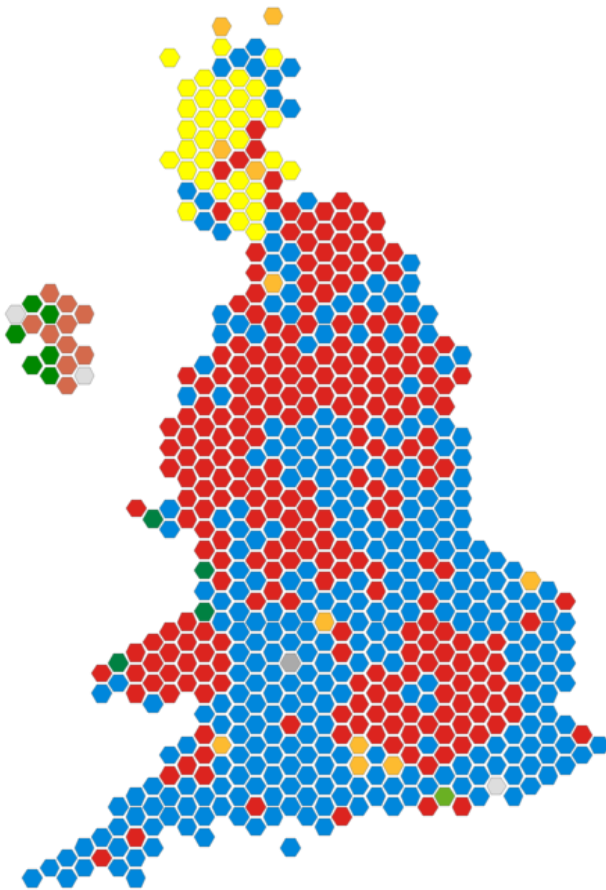
Seats gained
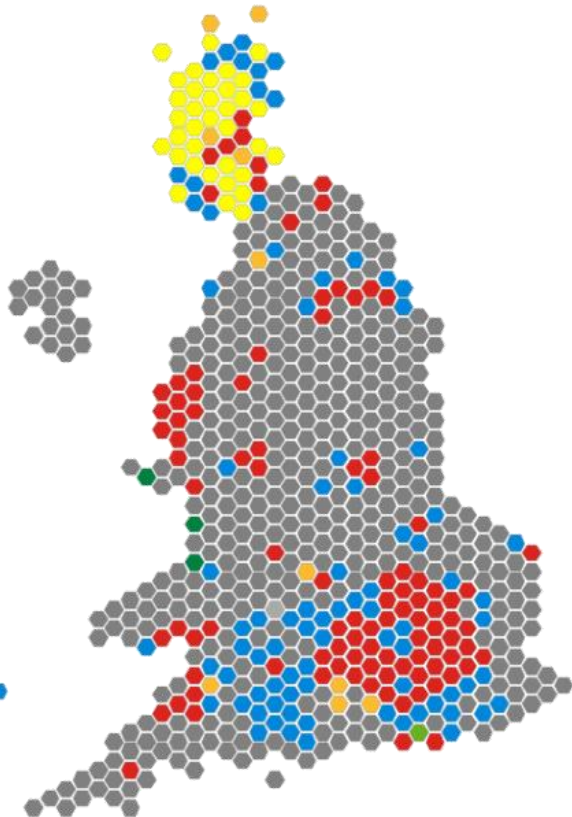
Seats Labour won in 2017
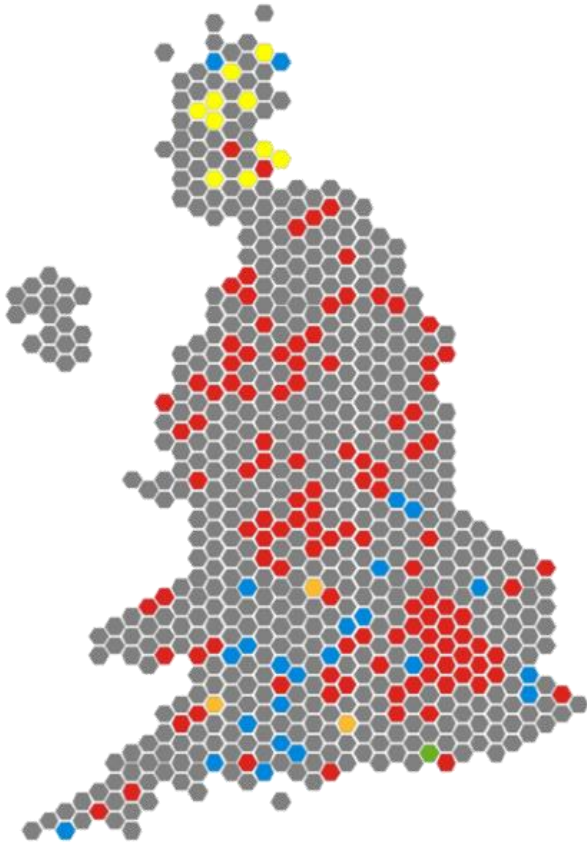
Seats the Conservatives won in 2017
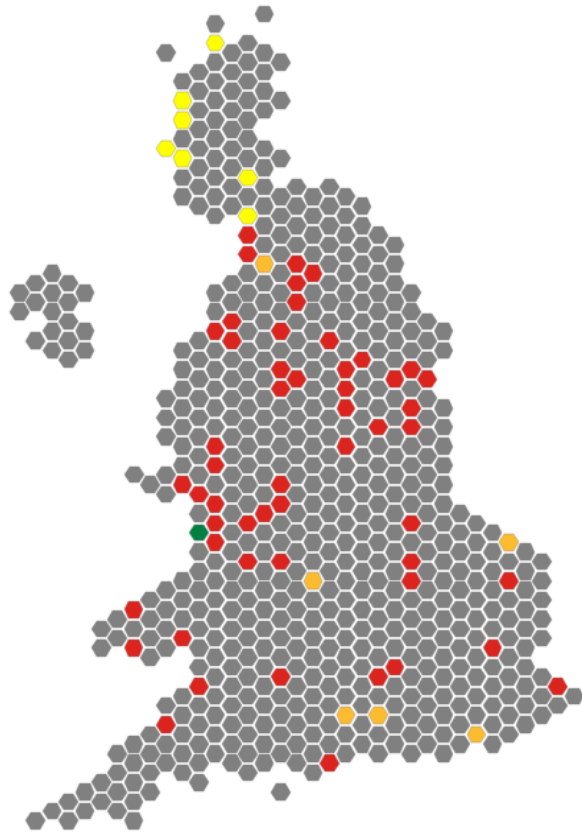
Leave voting seats in 2017
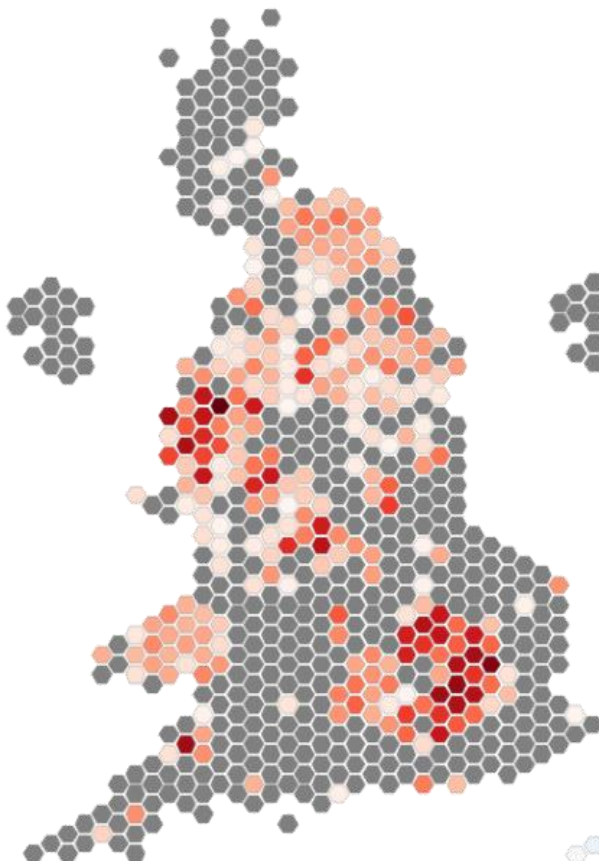
Remain voting seats in 2017

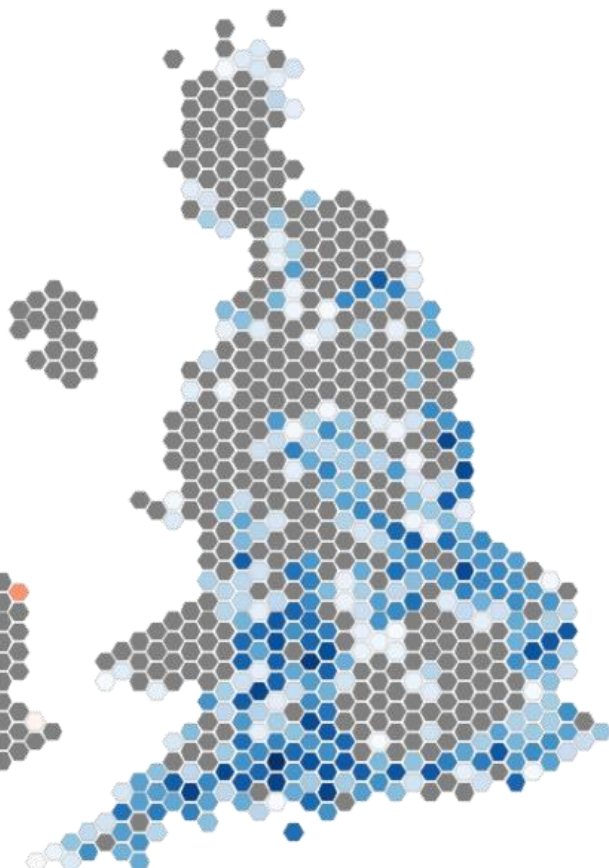Top 25% seats with the highest proportion of younger voters

Seats where the Tories are a close 2nd place, it shows the vulnerability of old safe Labour areas.

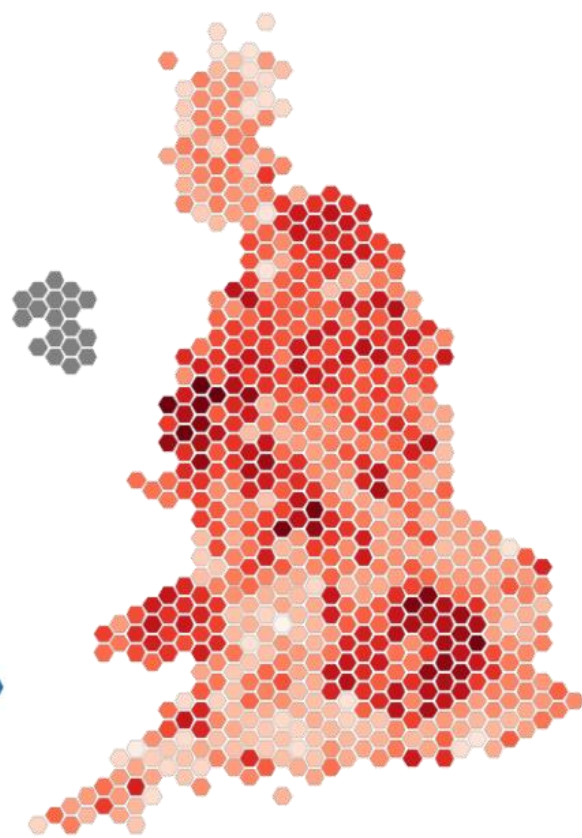Labour Majorities scaled, it shows their vulnerability in historically safe seats.

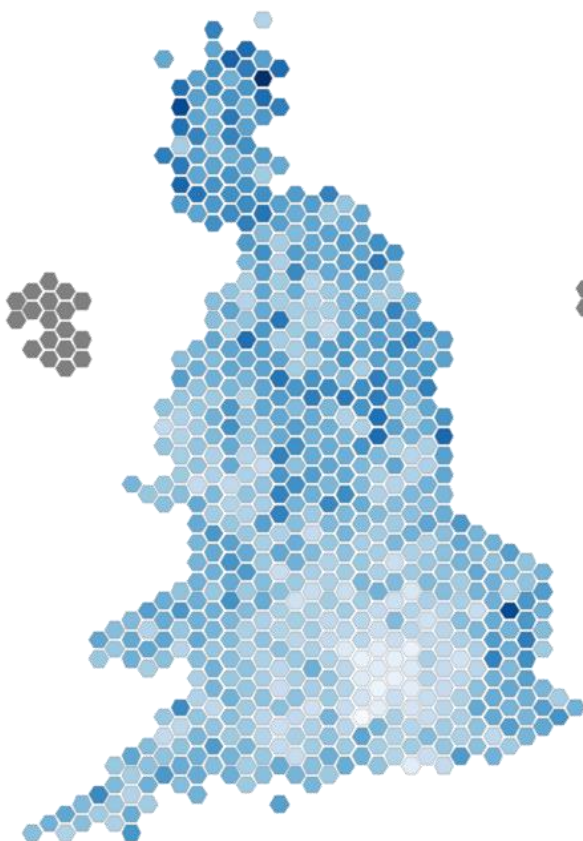Tory Majorities scaled, it shows their vulnerability in cosmopolitan Remain areas.

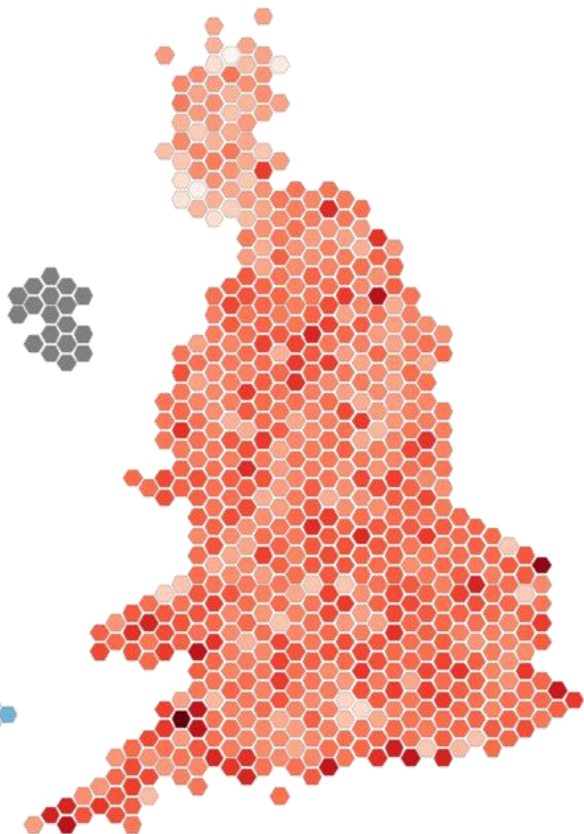Conservative Party vote share per constituency, 2017

Labour Party vote share per constituency, 2017

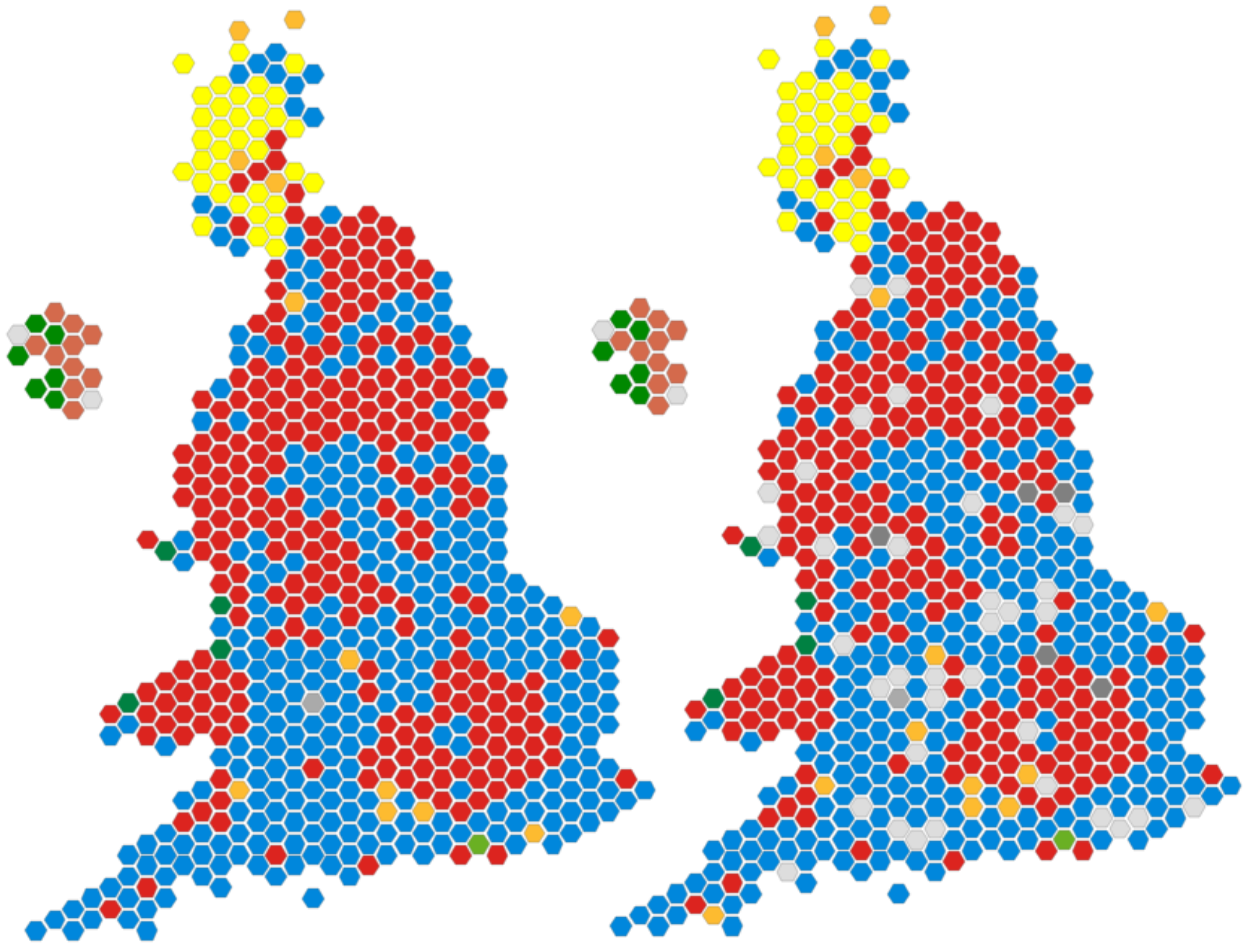Change in the Conservative vote share from the 2015 election

Change in the Labour vote share from the 2015 election

2017 GE result

2019 – Major Party Splits – Brexit & Independents effect.

The above maps show the potential of a deep Realignment emerging. These maps show how defections and suspensions of MPs are starting to change the parties within parliament. It highlights how the party elites are starting to split as the electorate has started to. Therefore, a full and deep realignment may be emerging in British politics post-Brexit and post the 2017 election.

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Data Used:

Wave 11 of the 2014-2018 British Election Study Internet Panel

Fieldhouse, E., J. Green., G. Evans., H. Schmitt, C. van der Eijk, J. Mellon and C. Prosser (2017) British Election Study Internet Panel Wave 11. DOI: 10.15127/1.293723

Wave 12 of the 2014-2018 British Election Study Internet Panel

Fieldhouse, E., J. Green., G. Evans., H. Schmitt, C. van der Eijk, J. Mellon and C. Prosser (2017) British Election Study Internet Panel Wave 12. DOI: 10.15127/1.293723

Wave 13 of the 2014-2018 British Election Study Internet Panel

Fieldhouse, E., J. Green., G. Evans., H. Schmitt, C. van der Eijk, J. Mellon and C. Prosser (2017) British Election Study Internet Panel Wave 13. DOI: 10.15127/1.293723

About the Author

James Prentice was born and raised in the English southeast coastal town of Hastings. He attended Hastings College during his A-Level studies and attended the University of Kent during his undergraduate degree. After working a couple of years in local government, he went back to university and studied electoral behaviour at the University of Essex, gaining a distinction Masters degree in this field. He is currently close to completing his PhD at the University of Sussex in British electoral research and has made this book partly out of research contained within his PhD. If interested in other research undertaken by this author, you can use the following link to view other titles and blog posts. Website: https://www.capturepolitics.co.uk

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