



## The Great Realignment

### **Publish Date:**

December 2019

---

Britain's General Election- the results of which will, hopefully, be seen by the end of today (Sydney time)- is the most consequential in a generation. It pits avid socialist Labour Party leader Jeremy Corbyn against Brexit-backing Conservative Prime Minister Boris Johnson.

Corbyn would cripple Britain's economy, associate with terrorist organisations like Hamas, Hezbollah and the IRA, and wants to have a second referendum on the European Union to undermine the largest democratic vote in the country's history. His campaign has been marred by charges of anti-Semitism, with almost half of Britain's Jews saying they would consider leaving the country if he wins.

The past six weeks have focused on Brexit, public services, and leadership. But something bigger is happening below the surface. The earthquake reshaping politics across Western democracies will define this election result.

In 1960, leading political scientist Seymour Martin Lipset wrote that "for most of the 20<sup>th</sup> century,

---



working-class voters in developed countries generally supported Left-oriented parties, while middle- and upper-class voters supported Right-oriented parties”.

This is no longer true. Working-class voters are increasingly moving to the right. Progressive middle-class voters are moving to the left. This realignment is defying expectations, changing party positioning and redefining left and right. We saw this all at play in Donald Trump’s 2016 presidential victory and Scott Morrison’s surprise 2019 election result.

Now the latest YouGov poll for Great Britain has the Conservatives at an extraordinary 17-point lead among the lower middle-class and working-class voters, known as the ‘C2DE’. By comparison, the Conservatives lead the middle-class ‘ABC1’ grouping by a narrow five points.

The United Kingdom is having an election because of the Remain-majority parliament’s repeated failure to deliver Brexit.

Johnson’s strategy is to break the so-called ‘Red Wall’ of working-class traditionally Labour seats in the Midlands and North of England that voted Leave- but in the process sacrifice some Remain supporting areas that have voted Conservative in the past. This is why he has spent much of the campaign wearing high-vis standing next to adoring workers. He wants to win Britain’s equivalent to Scott Morrison’s ‘Quiet Australians,’ who swept the Liberals to an unexpected victory by winning outer suburban and regional voters.

These are the people who are alienated by Corbyn’s London-centric elitism. They are unlikely to have a university education, are not ashamed to be British and value stability, safety and unity. They live in places like Bishop Auckland, a constituency in the northeast of England that has never in its 130-year history, been held by a Conservative. But with a narrow 502 vote Labour majority, and with over 60 percent of residents voting for Brexit, it is widely forecast to change hands.

Corbyn claims to care about ‘workers’, but his strongest support comes from progressive middle-class Remain voters in London and university towns like Oxford and Cambridge.

Labour was ahead 16 points in the final London poll from YouGov. These are the sort of people comfortable with change and diversity, who like the cosmopolitan ideals of the European Union, and are supportive of immigration and action on climate change.

My book, *Democracy in a Divided Australia*, argues that major parties which developed along traditional left-right class divides can struggle to handle this new dynamic. The main parties now depend on a coalition of voters from a mixture of both backgrounds. If they go too much in one direction they can alienate from the other side, as Morrison found when he got a lower vote in inner-suburban areas that were historically Liberal strongholds, such as Tony Abbott losing his seat of Warringah to an independent.

The Conservatives are similarly at risk of losing seats in London and the southeast that voted to Remain. This includes Esher and Walton held by foreign secretary Dominic Raab and leafy



Richmond Park held by minister Zac Goldsmith. If too many of these sorts of seats are lost at this election, or in future, it could spell electoral defeat for the Conservatives.

Meanwhile, in the hope of winning over traditionally Labour-supporting Brexiteers, Boris has moved to the left on economics. He has promised more spending and state intervention to help failing businesses, albeit much less than Corbyn. This strategy, which has echoes of Trump's approach to trade and manufacturing, is not risk-free. It gives credence to many of Corbyn's economic arguments.

Even if, as predicted, the Conservatives win, this is not the end of tumultuous times, Politics remains very much in flux, in Britain and throughout the English-speaking world and beyond.

**Originally published in:**  
The Daily Telegraph