

Andrew Marr: British Politics is due for an earthquake

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LSE MSc student John Ray on Andrew Marr's keynote speech at the Polis 2015 Conference, 27 March 2015 chaired by Charlie Beckett.

Andrew Marr set the tone for the second keynote speech of Polis 2015 with a bold pronouncement: This could be the last general election for the UK as we know it, or with the UK as a member of the EU.

But this shocking prognosis elicited no reaction from the audience. In fact there were more tweets about a David Cameron owl joke that Marr closed with. And this proves his point; in an atomized Britain, local issues increasingly hold more weight than macro-level changes, which are chained to institutions and structures that the public largely mistrust and view as out of touch.



If this Polis conference were to be defined by one phrase it would be “650 by-elections, instead of one general election”. From panel to panel, this saying – or something like it – continued to guide the discourse of the day, but Marr hit the nail on the head directly.

He discussed the academic elitism and professionalization of the media, arguing that there is little opportunity remaining for the working class to get involved with a politico-journalist establishment that is less and less representative of the people whose views they claim to voice. Politicians, Marr said, are there to “shape and ventriloquise” underlying societal issues, but the elitist cabal that they’ve evolved into can no longer claim to adequately represent a center.

This, he argued, sets the stage for 2015. A Britain that is divided into increasingly tribal units, an elite class that is increasingly untouchable and out of touch, and a voting base that is increasingly apathetic and skeptical.

These developments have arisen from a variety of factors, but one that Marr specifically highlighted [in a recent New Statesman article](#) was the disconnect between cultural dialogue and political change after the 2007/2008 credit crunch and ensuing recession. Marr argued that the Right ‘won’ politically in England and in Europe as “the initial view of a social crisis caused by out-of-control capitalism was replaced by the belief that it was a bloated, out-of-control state that was largely to blame”. This victory had political consequences that eroded trust in political decision makers to reflect the interests of their constituents and, because of this, individuals began acting out of self-interest en masse rather than following the communal ethos that trust in the center inspired. “The middle has collapsed” and left in its wake a Britain divided by a wide manner of cleavages.

In a particularly telling exchange, a member of the audience asked Marr to provide her with a compelling reason to vote in the general election, and the BBC host took his time before responding with something to the effect of ‘Well you shouldn’t vote if you don’t care about taxes, you shouldn’t vote if you don’t care about education, you shouldn’t vote if you don’t care about immigration, you shouldn’t vote if you don’t care about the future of the UK...’ and finished off his response saying



'You should vote if you care about any of these things'. It was a powerful rhetorical argument in favor of voting, and against apathy, but the exchange captured the essence of this election: a public who largely can't be bothered and a government that will be deciding the future of the country regardless.

Great politicians, throughout history, have been able to mobilize unity out of division, with an ability to cut through pluralism and create a unified trust in their decision-making, as well as their government's. With Britain drifting further and further away from this vision and closer to issue-based politics, it's worth considering if any of the current British leaders can bring these disparate elements back together, or if this is the beginning of a major change to British politics as we know it.

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This article is by LSE MSc student John Ray

Read press coverage of Andrew Marr's talk in [The Independent](#) and [The Times](#).

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