

# Jeremy Corbyn could change British politics and out-perform expectations – provided the Conservatives split over Europe

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By Democratic Audit UK

2015-8-10

*In Jeremy Corbyn, the Labour Party could be about to elect its most left-wing leader in a generation. But would it be a disaster as the mainstream press are arguing? **Alun Wyburn-Powell** argues that he could well out-perform expectations provided the Conservatives, as many suspect, split over Europe.*



Corbynmania (Credit: [Ciaran Norris, CC BY NC 2.0](#))

A left-wing Labour Party leader very close to his seventieth birthday, leading a divided party which had lost the previous election, trying to unseat a female Conservative prime minister. This was the situation in 1983 and it could be the situation in 2020, if Jeremy Corbyn wins the Labour Party leadership and Theresa May takes over from David Cameron. Both are well within the realms of possibility.

What would happen then? In 1983 the Labour Party under Michael Foot went down to a crushing defeat. It is very tempting to assume that history would repeat itself in 2020. The Conservative Party already seems confident that it would. Most of the press will try to draw parallels and hope for a repeat of 1983. The newspapers will be very hostile to Jeremy Corbyn, although, like Margaret Thatcher, he claims not to read them, and daily newspaper circulation is now less than half what it was in 1983.

More than ever we are aware of the dangers of predicting the future of British politics. The opinion polls failed to predict the outcome of the 2015 general election even days before the ballot. Former Governor of the Bank of England, Mervyn King warned that the party implementing spending cuts after the 2010 election could be doomed to be out of power for a generation. Instead the spending cuts came to be seen by voters as prudent financial

management and the Conservatives were chosen by the electorate to implement more of the same.

Many on the right of the Labour Party (including Tony Blair) have said that a Tony Blair-type leader is the only hope for Labour's return to power. But, Tony Blair was a successful at a time when the Conservative Party was failing to do its own job properly. He correctly identified an empty middle ground for Labour to occupy at that time. There is no vacancy there now.

Looking at the electoral positions of the parties in 2020, it is likely that the SNP will have passed its high-water mark at Westminster. Labour could only possibly lose one more seat to the SNP, but have plenty of scope to go up. The Liberal Democrats may begin to recover under Tim Farron's leadership, but as they lost more seats to the Conservatives than to Labour at the last election, any recovery in seats may be more likely to come from the Conservatives than from Labour. UKIP achieved second place in many Labour-held constituencies in 2015, but were well short of threatening to take large numbers of seats from Labour. A Farage-led UKIP would no longer be a novelty and a more-electable replacement for Nigel Farage does not seem to be on the horizon. The Greens seem to be destined to continue their steady, but very slow, headway. The Labour Party's performance in 2020 is likely to hinge on its success or failure against the Conservatives, and this could depend on two things – whether it splits, and whether the Conservative Party splits.

The Conservatives are riven on the issues of Heathrow expansion and, more importantly, Europe. They will have fought the EU referendum in two factions and will have to choose a new leader in the aftermath, if David Cameron keeps his promise to retire.

Labour perhaps has less at stake than it first seems in experimenting with a Corbyn leadership. There is no sure-fire election winner among the other three leadership candidates. If Jeremy Corbyn loses the next election he will almost certainly be replaced as Labour leader and a different, newer generation of potential leaders could be in the running. If Jeremy Corbyn wins the election for Labour, which is not unthinkable if his party remains united and the Conservatives split, then the Corbyn experiment may change the face of British politics to a position where there are multiple parties, each with a clear minority position. It may illustrate that voters look for authenticity more than a position on a left-right scale.

If a Corbyn-led Labour Party recovered somewhat at the next election, say better than Ed Miliband's 232 seats and better than Gordon Brown's 258 but not enough to win, the party would be left still out of power and with the trickiest of dilemmas. Should it move even further to the left? Should it try a different leader with the same brand of policies?

The greatest threat to the Labour Party could be a modest success for Jeremy Corbyn in 2020 and the greatest threat to the Conservatives remains Europe. Jeremy Corbyn would probably gracefully leave the scene if he lost the election, but Europe will not go away.

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