

# THE ELECTION RESULT IN THREE GRAPHS

*Danny Dorling is a British social geographer and is the Halford Mackinder Professor of Geography of the School of Geography and the Environment of the University of Oxford. Here he discusses the election result and whether the result really was remarkable.*



Danny Dorling

There was more to see in the June 2017 UK General Election than has yet been described. It is partly because the result itself was so unexpected that we have not yet asked what it might mean and what it highlights. The first graph below was widely shared around the Internet shortly after the General Election. It shows that under Jeremy Corbyn's leadership Labour achieved its largest swing as conventionally measured since that of 1945. Arguably the swing was even greater than that of 1945, which occurred over a ten-year period (the previous general election was held in 1935). This latest swing occurred in just two years.

a swing. The Conservative vote did not fall, in fact it rose by 5% to 42% of all those who voted. The Labour vote rose by almost twice as much, roughly 10%, to reach 40% of all who voted. Some voters will have swung from Tory to Labour (and a tiny number in the opposite direction), but most of the new Labour votes will have come from people who had voted for other parties in the past or who had not voted, especially from younger voters including those who had never been allowed to vote before because they were too young. The other reason Corbyn did so well is because Blair had done so badly in 2001 and 2005, Brown did even worse in 2010 and Miliband achieved only a risible positive swing in 2015

So what about the geography of the vote? In short this was national uniform swing with just a little regional variation. However, there was one noteworthy feature that has not been commented on at all. For the first time since 1979 the segregation index of British Conservative voters fell. The segregation index is the minimum proportion of Conservatives voters who would have to be moved between constituencies if there was to

What happened in 2017 was not really

## Corbyn gives Labour biggest vote share increase since 1945

Change in Labour's vote share on previous election

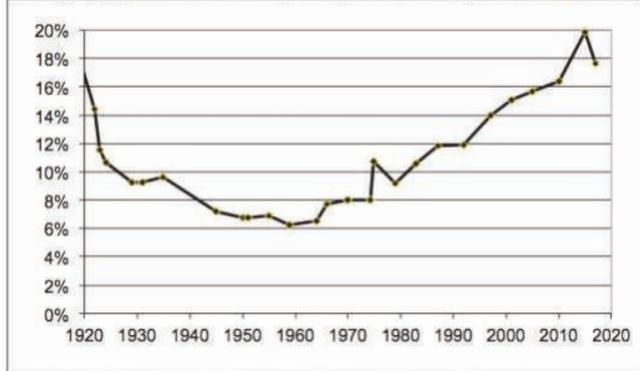


Source: House of Commons Library / BBC. 2017 results are after 649 seats declared.

Reproduced from <https://blogs.spectator.co.uk/2017/06/election-barometer-debacle-figures/>

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**The Segregation Index of Conservative voters 1920-2017 (All General Elections)**



Source: updated Figure 13 here: <http://www.dannydorling.org/books/injustice/figures/>

ever be an absolutely uniform distribution of support for that party. That index had reached a historic peak in 2015, beating its last ever-highest record that was held in 1918. At every General Election from 1979 to 2015 support for the Conservative party rose the most in the areas it had already done best in. That almost forty-year trend ended in 2017. It is not impossible that the 2017 fall in Tory voter segregation is the beginning of a long fall, such as that which occurred from 1918 right through to the 1960s. Or it could just be a blip as occurred after the October 1974 General Election. It is too early to tell, but it is nevertheless remarkable.

The Conservative vote in the past became less segregated as the country became less economically polarised from 1918 through to the late 1960s and early 1970s. Then the Conservative vote became more and more segregated as prosperous areas voted more and more strongly for the Conservatives at each election after 1979 and the prosperous areas became richer while the poorer regions became poorer. At some point that had to end and this could be that point.

The last of the three graphs shows how quickly this all happened. This graph shows Labour's position in the average of all opinion polls taken each month from May 2015 to the 1st day of June 2017. The popularity of Labour is shown on the Y axis and the change in that popularity on the X axis. In May 2015 Labour on

average polled 33% of all those who said they would vote and the support for Labour was falling. The polls were not wrong back then, it is just that those interpreting the polls did not also take into account the changing direction of public sentiment.

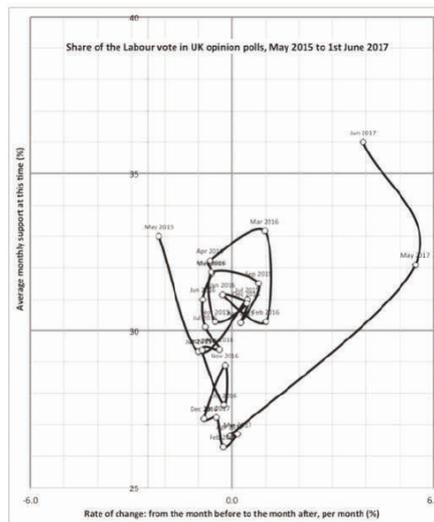
In great contrast, in May 2017 support for Labour was rising among the public at a rate of almost six percentage points a month. By the 1st of June 2017 it stood at 36%; a week later they polled 40% in the actual election (the polls always lag actual voting intention).

There was a change in public sentiment during May 2017, a huge change; the antecedents of which has been building up for years. Spring 2017 was when the pressure finally became too much. No major party has ever seen such a great and rapid rise in the opinion polls, since polling began.

So what now? We don't know. But at least we know that what has just happened was remarkable. It was as remarkable as the Labour win of 1945, despite not being a win. For Labour to have done even better would have been completely and utterly unprecedented in terms of the speed of change of public opinion.

Most importantly, for the first time in almost forty years the geographical trend of those living in areas with the most money increasingly voting for the party that looked after the richest areas has been broken. The segregation index of Tory voters needs to fall again for Labour to win the next general election, and Labour must sustain its popularity in the polls and remember how much can change in just a few weeks of campaigning, if that campaigning captures enough of the national imagination.

[www.dannydorling.org](http://www.dannydorling.org)



Source: Drawn by the author, details at: <http://www.dannydorling.org/?p=6046>

Higher resolution versions of the three graphs follow below, as well as the original text in a larger font size:

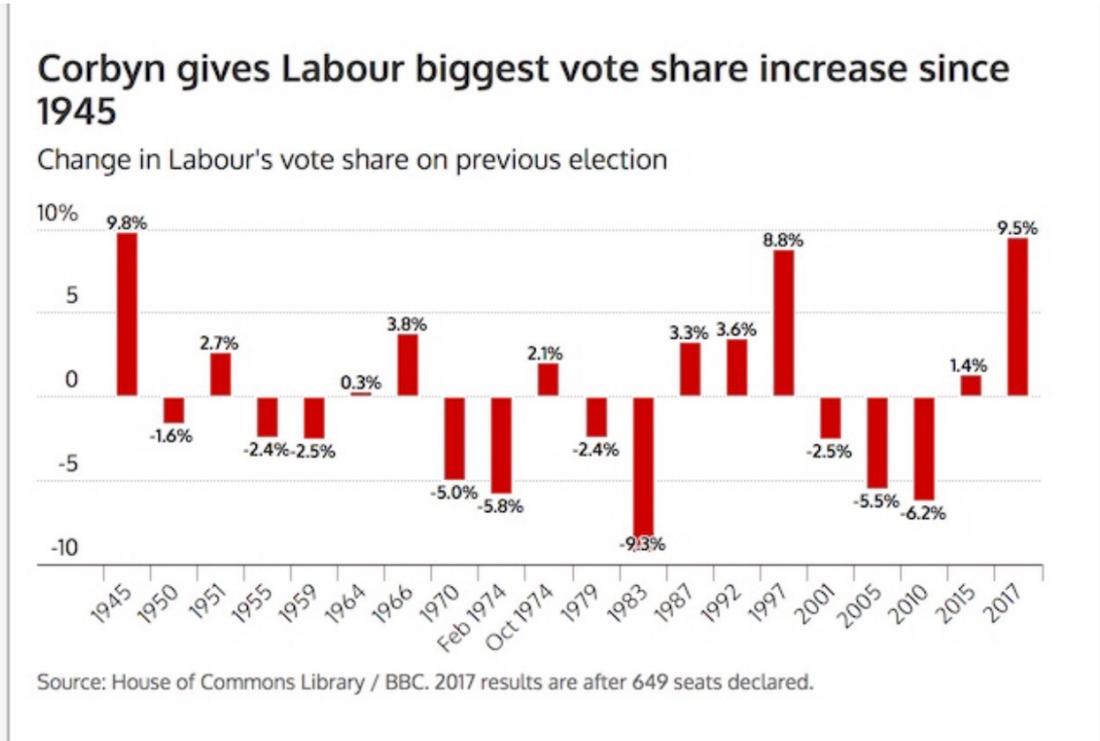


Figure 1a

An earlier version was tweeted by Fraser Nelson after 629 seats had declared and this may have been seen more widely. It differs very little from the version above:

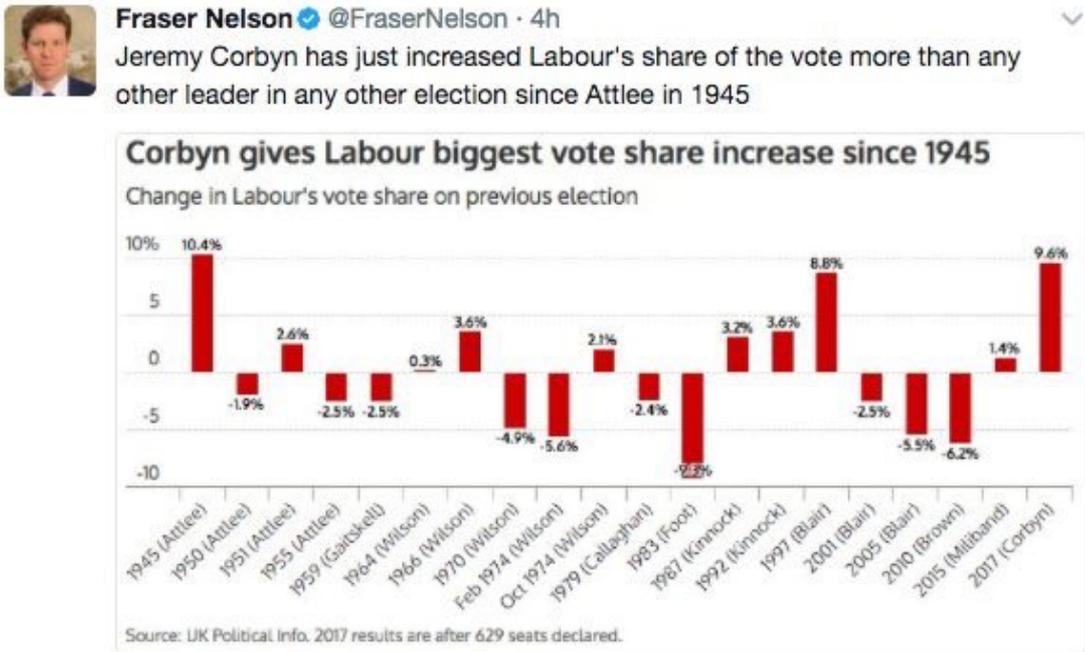


Figure 1b

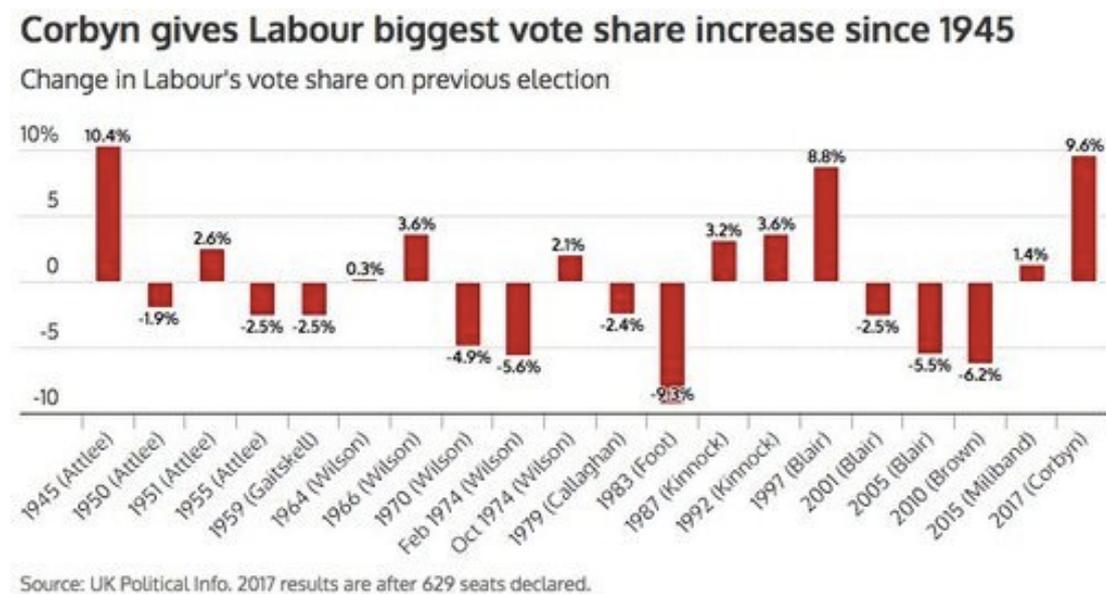
That second version of Figure 1 is also shown in the text below with the names of the Labour leaders at each general election below it:

## The Election Result in Three Graphs

Danny Dorling, **Public Sector Focus**, July/August, pp.66-67

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Figure 1:

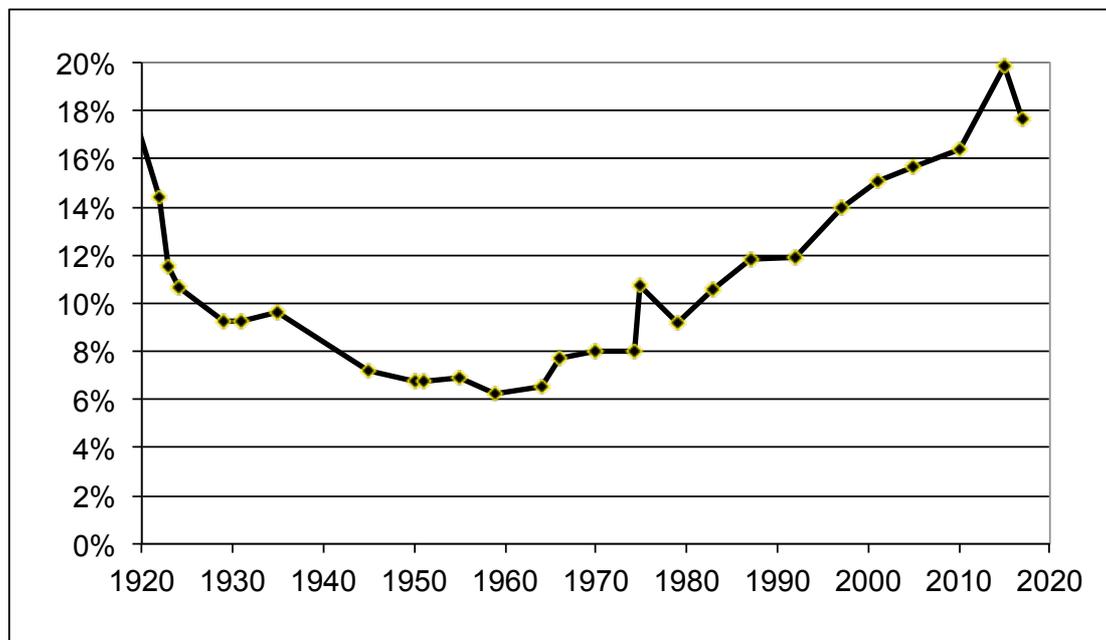


Source: <https://www.counterpunch.org/2017/06/09/the-facts-proving-corbyns-election-triumph/>

What happened in 2017 was not really a swing. The Conservative vote did not fall, in fact it rose by 5% to 42% of all those who voted. The Labour vote rose by almost twice as much, roughly 10%, to reach 40% of all who voted. Some voters will have swung from Tory to Labour (and a tiny number in the opposite direction), but most of the new Labour votes will have come from people who had voted for other parties in the past or who had not voted, especially from younger voters including those who had never been allowed to vote before because they were too young. The other reason Corbyn did so well is because Blair had done so badly in 2001 and 2005, Brown did even worse in 2010 and Miliband achieved only a risible positive swing in 2015 (as the graph above makes clear).

So what about the geography of the vote? In short this was national uniform swing with just a little regional variation. However, there was one noteworthy feature that has not been commented on at all. *For the first time since 1979 the segregation index of British Conservative voters fell.* The segregation index is the minimum proportion of Conservatives voters who would have to be moved between constituencies if there was to ever be an absolutely uniform distribution of support for that party. That index had reached a historic peak in 2015, beating its last ever-highest record that was held in 1918. At every General Election from 1979 to 2015 support for the Conservative party rose the most in the areas it had already done best in. That almost forty-year trend ended in 2017. It is not impossible that the 2017 fall in Tory voter segregation is the beginning of a long fall, such as that which occurred from 1918 right through to the 1960s. Or it could just be a blip as occurred after the October 1974 General Election. It is too early to tell, but it is nevertheless remarkable.

**Figure 2: The Segregation Index of Conservative voters 1920-2017  
(All General Elections)**



Source: updated Figure 13 here:

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