PRCA

The Power of Communication

Review of Political Predictions

REVIEW OF POLITICAL PREDICTIONS

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Foreword

It is proving hard to make accurate political predictions these days. Pollsters find it difficult, as do academics, city analysts, newspapers, bookmakers, PR consultants, and the political parties themselves. The PRCA, representing the PR and communications industry, including those who specialise in political communications, has been carrying out a review in recent months. We wanted to know why predicting political events is so hard, how we can be better at doing it, and how best to adapt to an ever more unpredictable world.

The review has itself had to contend with unpredictable events. Just as our work was taking shape, as a retrospective on the election of Donald Trump, the vote for Brexit, and the 2015 General Election, Theresa May called another election. This time, all of us involved with making political predictions, were determined to get it right. The pollsters fine-tuned their methodology, the markets hedged, and the political communications professionals were more guarded, but we all really knew what was going to happen – a big Tory majority. Wrong again! Instead of a confidence inspiring vindication that we had learnt how to make better predictions, we were taught a humbling lesson in how, and why, we are still getting it wrong.

In this collection of essays, our contributors consider different dimensions of making political predictions, from opinion polls to the roll of campaigns, social media, and economic indicators. Common themes have emerged: voter behaviour is more fluid, flawed assumptions are made, data is to be handled with care, and events intervene. The most valuable insights of all are those which may help us in the future. We should recognise groupthink, whether that is on social media or in the Westminster bubble. We should have a healthy scepticism of certainty and of conventional wisdom. We should not become trapped by our predictions, willing them to be accurate, even when we begin to doubt. When the facts change, we must be allowed to change our mind, recognising that opinion may be changing right up until the moment people vote.

There was, as you would expect, much discussion of opinion polls during our review. The British Polling Council urged us to recognise their own extensive work in the Sturgis Inquiry, following the 2015 General Election. We are particularly grateful to James Endersby and Adam Drummond from Opinium, who volunteered to help us better understand the challenges for opinion pollsters. People expect 'statistical magic', yet pollsters typically have data from only a few thousand people out of an electorate of millions.

The 'margin of error' is stated for a reason, but newspapers tend to present polling figures as being fixed and accurate, instead of being more of an indicator of where things stand at a given point, in a fluctuating situation. Many things change during an election or referendum campaign so it is not surprising that in all recent elections and referendums, the polls that most accurately predict political outcomes are those taken closest to the time people cast their ballots. When it comes to polls, we should always remember that they are snapshots, not forecasts.

Political outcomes are shaped in part by events, both planned and unexpected. One of the planned features of recent campaigns have been televised debates, yet the format is uncertain until the last minute, and we do not know how they will turn out. In the 2010 General Election, Nick Clegg's breakthrough debate performance left other leaders saying 'I agree with Nick' and propelled the Liberal Democrats into government.

At the 2015 election, Ed Miliband's stumble, both in performance terms and in literal terms as he tripped leaving the stage, confirmed some voters doubts, while at that same election, the SNP's Nicola Sturgeon could not put a foot wrong. Other moments where we gain new insights into political leaders can happen spontaneously, like John Prescott's punch or Gordon Brown's encounter with Gillian Duffy. It was, perhaps, Theresa May's wish to avoid this in the 2017 General Election that led her to appear too distant and unwilling to engage with the voters, in contrast to the populist approach of Jeremy Corbyn.

Other events, outside of the campaigns, impact too. In the US, the announcement by FBI Director, James Comey, days before the 2016 Presidential Election, that an investigation into Hillary Clinton's use of private email was to be re-opened, had a huge impact. In the UK, the tragic murder of Jo Cox MP days before the EU referendum and the terror attacks during this year's UK General Election campaign, led to the suspension of normal campaigning.

In his contribution, Dr. Matt Carter argues that the campaigns have a dramatic impact on election or referendum outcomes. From the brilliance of Saatchi and Saatchi's positioning of Margaret Thatcher in the UK in the 1980s, to the extraordinary stadium filling excitement of Barack Obama's win in the US in

2008, there are many examples of effective campaigns. We also know that parties and campaign groups sometimes get their messages, policies, and targeting spectacularly wrong. The relentlessly negative messages of the Stronger In campaign during the referendum were a turn off for voters. The Conservative manifesto launch in the 2017 General Election, announcing unpopular policies, particularly on care funding, was a disaster. The Conservative Party also made serious targeting errors, setting their sights on traditionally safe Labour seats like Dennis Skinner MP's Bolsover only to find on election day that traditionally safe Conservative seats like Canterbury and Kensington were in jeopardy.

Changing political behaviour may make the impact of events and the effectiveness of campaigns greater factors in shaping political outcomes than in times past if, as Dr. Jansev Jemal argues, voters are now less tribal. Fewer voters express strong levels of identification with a political party than they once did and patterns of voter behaviour are often surprising. This has been particularly true of voter turnout, where polling models and many commentators have underestimated likely voter turnout amongst some groups. In the last US presidential election, groups favourable to Donald Trump turned out in higher numbers than expected in some states, while in the UK's EU referendum, many first time voters turned out to support Brexit.

In the recent UK General Election, the turnout of young people in greater numbers than at previous elections was clearly a significant benefit to Jeremy Corbyn's Labour Party, particularly in university towns and cities. In her essay on populism, Martha Dalton sees the overall rise in turnout as good news but cautions that non-voters are erratic. This is a group who have walked away from politics before and may do so again. There is no doubt that Facebook and other social media platforms have increased engagement amongst some groups of voters. The role of social media is considered by Emma Pointer, who writes on the way it can reinforce rather than challenge our existing views. Her conclusion is that social media can be a poor barometer of voting intention unless we learn how to listen in better and understand how different demographics use different channels.

Marshall Manson believes that many of us in the PR and communications world live and work in a London bubble, with a wide chasm of understanding between the establishment and anti-establishment. Academic Simon Goldsworthy challenges his own profession not to retreat into a world of their own, in which the contribution academia makes to political predictions is hindered by being out of sympathy with large swathes of voters. Helpful suggestions on how to 'burst the bubble' are offered by Lionel Zetter, who urges us to have an open door and an open mind, including listening to people who hold unfashionable or contrary views.

James Turgoose and Iain Anderson both reflect on the lessons from recent elections for those of us who are called on to give advice on political futures. One theme rises above all others, that we should place less emphasis on simplistic political predictions about what may appear to be binary choices, Leave vs Remain, Labour vs Conservative, and more emphasis on a linear analysis of political risk. What use is it to correctly forecast Brexit for example, without looking ahead to the broad spectrum of possible forms that Brexit may take – think 'hard' or 'soft', to use the vernacular. The same is true for this year's General Election, where many correctly predicted there would be a Conservative government, but failed to consider the huge implications of a hung parliament, loss of authority for the Prime Minister, inability to take forward manifesto promises, and impact on Brexit negotiations. These potential outcomes were all possible and could have been plotted, modelled, and considered in boardrooms and newsrooms.

Thank you to all those who have contributed to our review through our discussions earlier in the year, and this pamphlet. A necessary and appropriate humility has been applied to considering how we can all be better at political predictions. A few voices critical of this review, who claimed to have correctly predicted Trump's win and Brexit, did not want to share in our humility at the outset of this project, but the recent General Election taught them a sharp lesson in how easy it is to get political predictions wrong.

I hope that our review provides some useful explanation of what has gone before, and even more importantly, will help with what comes next. Making political predictions is not going to get any easier, but by taking account of more sources, being aware of the limitations of data, listening to different voices, and offering a broader and less binary perspective on what the future holds, we should be able to see the future more clearly.

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Markets, money, and politics

Markets and politics. They are two increasingly uncomfortable bedfellows. True, there is usually an axiomatic link between political risk and markets, but finance seems to be as poor as pollsters these days in deciphering the trends.

Did you keep an eye on French bond yields before the people of France voted earlier this year? Of course you did. Isn't everyone these days? No one wanted to get caught out, YET they did. Missing the Brexit and Trump zeitgeist, global investors were determined not to miss out again. And they were asking the question daily - what's happening in politics? Fortunately for them – it appears that French voters and French pollsters are in better alignment than in many other Western democracies.

During the French campaign, it was reported around €16 billion of French bonds were being traded each day. That's double the usual amount and the volumes were similar to levels last seen five years ago in the midst of the Eurozone sovereign debt crisis. And the trades were 'international' – that's US investors in particular - rather than French domestic investors – moving the money. Perhaps Wall Street's proximity to Trump Tower places the art of the politically possible these days into much sharper focus. But we saw the same trends during Indyref and Brexit. Huge amounts of Sterling and Gilts were traded before, during (overnight on polling day), and since. It led one business commentator to refer to the Pound as the real Opposition to HM Opposition. He had a point…

> "In fact there is a fundamental question on the table – is political risk analysis actually possible anymore?"

Let's keep going with the French analysis – it seems a little easier to do. Le Pen – who in the end was crushed by Macron, defied traditional analysis. Anti-EU, pro-Putin, anti-globalisation, pro-France first, and anti-Islamisation. The script was the same as Trump. But France was not America. The keys to the Elysee Palace are locked or opened by the French electoral system. Not an electoral college of states – not a 'Borgen'-style fudge – but in the end a binary final round choice where the first to 50.1% takes the prize. So that French bond investor was right to be trading hard right in the first round of the Presidential poll.

Maybe it is just Western markets trying to interpret Western politics that's the problem these days. In recent times emerging markets seem to have been more able to interpret political risk than established Western ones. Emerging democracies seem to be better able to keep things calmer than long standing ones.

The day the 2017 UK General Election was called, I was in Beijing. Wrong place – very wrong time. My attempts at getting away from UK politics were put on hold. But it did make me think about our techniques as a sector.

The 'Mao-ology' that used to be applied to Chinese politics and business is a whole lot easier to discern these days. While business spends ages trying to work out WHO is most important in the Chinese state machine on every issue– the plain fact is that the WHAT and WHEN of political life there has become a lot easier to discern.

As you probably gather, I spend most of my time trying to decode politics for markets. You used to be able to talk in 'absolutes'. There is no sense of that now. A polling number here or there no longer translates into a direct political effect. That means there is a need to make a real change in the calculation of political risk, but there are several questions around how to do it.

After Brexit and – before that - also after the 2015 General Election - the polling industry went into a kind of meltdown with practitioners desperately seeking answers for what went wrong. With the most modern of weighted analytical voter intention tools, most of them spectacularly misfired. Many long months have been spent trying to decode what happened.

Public affairs practitioners followed the polling just like markets. And many of their firm predictions fell flat. In fact, the commentariat continues to get this so wrong so often. And continue to do so even now.

Now all political risk practitioners can do is to talk in terms of the 'risk spectrum' in front of markets without being able to pinpoint directly what might firmly happen. This is a huge change for us all. And so the techniques used to decode must now change.

Before the Brexit referendum, we invited polling doyen Professor John Curtice to come and talk to an audience filled with people who make a direct 'trade' on political risk. Laying out the 'likelihood' of a Remain win – he was at pains to point out that the result 'might' just go the other way. But he went further than that… Addressing the many businesses who had been commissioning private polling during the referendum, he told them to stop the clock on that work. 'They are going to get it wrong' he declared. Of course, he was right. Supremely confident at 22:00 on 23rd June, 2016, markets traded Sterling to relative highs only for it to plummet rapidly after Asian investors saw what happened in Sunderland around 01:00!

And the same phenomenon has been achieved with Trump and UK General Election 2017. To some extent, markets are 'causal' themselves. When I awoke on referendum day to news that Remain was a certainty, I shuddered. There is nothing worse than markets ('fat cats' to many voters) taking their votes for granted. The day before America voted, the same thing happened. Voters across the US turned on their breakfast televisions to be told the market had already 'priced in' a Hillary win. Little people - big vote.

In fact there is a fundamental question on the table – is political risk analysis actually possible anymore? For the past decade, many 'lobbyists' have eschewed that term and have preferred to call themselves 'political analysts', a term which has gained real traction in the US as a way of making the sector sound more 'quant' than 'qual'.

But the reality is we now need a variety of approaches and tools. In the aftermath of the election, my team developed the Brexometer – a risk spectrum around the biggest issue for markets and UK business on the horizon. A 21:59 on 8th June, 2017, it appeared there was no spectrum to plot. By 22.01, the nature of Brexit scenarios once again seemed endless.

The key thing for any business is to provide tools to be able to plan ahead. Highly regulated businesses also have another dimension to consider – and that's the likelihood that your regulator will be asking tough questions about your risk plan around political events – that's your Plan A stress tested to death alongside your Plan B and Plan C, etc. if things don't work out. So – increasingly the job is to help markets get ahead of those political risks.

On that range of risks, what's the safest advice? Strike that – what's the best advice. Unfortunately, there is no doubt it is to prepare for the worst possible political or related economic outcome. And watching firms and markets prepare for that leads me to the conclusion that business increasingly operates well ahead of the politics. It has learned the lessons.

'No surprises' is an oft repeated business mantra. It's usually a very good reason to have good political counsel around the table. In an environment where a polling data point or a political decision does not create a linear political effect, there has never been a more interesting time to do this job.

The facts are constantly changing and so must we.

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"Now all political risk practitioners can do is to talk in terms of the 'risk spectrum' in front of markets without being able to pinpoint directly what might firmly happen."

Dr. Matt Carter MPRCA

Modern election campaigns and the challenge to political polling

In the endless debate about the accuracy of election opinion polls, one thing consistently seems to be overlooked: the role of the election campaign itself.

Critics are quick to point out when final election results don't perfectly match the opinion poll estimates, without taking into account the role of the campaign itself in changing voter behaviour. What's more, voters are increasingly fluid in their approach to parties and turnout, meaning an even greater likelihood of change in opinion before polling day.

So can recent elections in the US and UK tell us anything about the impact that campaigns have and the challenges they provide to pollsters? A quick analysis suggests they can and indeed these elections may help point to some better ways for polling firms and the media to approach political campaigns.

In early May, a few days after Theresa May called her surprise General Election, James Kirkup wrote a confessional piece for The Spectator's Coffee House blog entitled: 'What journalists know, but can never admit: election campaigns don't matter'. Kirkup's point was that the events on the campaign trail rarely make any difference. 'Most of the people covering it know that the national-level messaging they focus on makes no material difference to the outcome.'

In fact, the 2017 election campaign seemed to matter quite a lot.

This election provides a valuable case study in how elections can shift opinion dramatically, something that is reassuring for campaign strategists like me that spend hours trying to build campaigns that change the way people vote. It also provides some important lessons for political pollsters.

The election was called with the Conservatives almost 20 points ahead of Labour in the opinion polls. The actual result gave the Tories only a two point margin of victory. The difference between the two is explained by a catastrophic Conservative national campaign that failed on almost all of its key objectives.

Their first objective was to frame the election. I was always taught in Labour HQ that the party that can frame the election would control the campaign. The Conservatives wanted the election to be about who is best to deliver a 'good Brexit', best to lead the negotiations with Brussels, and best to stand up for Britain. This was a frame that they felt would play to their strengths and Labour's weaknesses.

Unfortunately for Theresa May, the Conservatives consistently failed to control the theme of the campaign. This was an unusual campaign, with two major terrorist attacks in the middle of the election which stopped campaigning and forced a different agenda into the debate.

The Conservatives' failure to frame the election can't be blamed solely on these events. The robotic repetition of the 'strong and stable' message failed to ignite public interest, the low profile of their leading figures regularly gave the news agenda to Labour, and a disastrous manifesto launch created plenty of diversions away from their main theme.

By the end of the campaign, Brexit was low down on the list of issues people said they voted on. Sky Data said the biggest issue was health (23%), followed by the economy (20%), immigration (15%), security and terrorism (14%), and Britain's relationship with the EU (14%).

The second Tory campaign goal was to use Theresa May's leadership to win votes beyond the traditional Conservative areas. According to YouGov, in the week May called the election she had a lead over Corbyn as 'best Prime Minister' of 39 points. However, the campaign revealed a major flaw in the Conservative's strategy. They had billed Theresa May as the next Margaret Thatcher: tough, strong, and decisive. Yet the campaign revealed this image to be inauthentic. May was shown consistently to be cautious, uncertain, and uncomfortable with the public. In contrast, Jeremy Corbyn came across as true to himself, a compassionate man who can engage with people as a human being.

By 8th June, 2017, there were more questions remaining about Theresa May's leadership than anyone else's, and she ended the campaign with the same 'best Prime Minister' numbers as Corbyn.

The third was in their targeting strategy. The Conservatives believed they could win seats in traditional Labour areas with high levels of Brexit support.

May spent many days on the campaign trail visiting seats Labour had traditionally considered to be safe but which had decisively voted to leave the EU in 2016. This meant neglecting seats that were considered to be 'marginal'.

The Conservatives targeting strategy added to their undoing, with them gaining small swings in some traditional Labour areas but not sufficient to win the seats. At the same time, they lost a series of marginal seats to Labour by tiny numbers of votes, including Kensington (by 20 votes), Crewe and Nantwich (48 votes), and Keighley (249 votes).
The only area where the Conservatives made more spectacular gains was in Scotland, but this was more about an anti-SNP than an anti-EU vote.

Labour, in contrast, ran an effective

local get out the vote (GOTV) campaign which turned out supporters in the seats that mattered most. It's too early to see data on the effectiveness of the ground campaign, but we know from previous studies that effective voter engagement campaigns can have a dramatic impact on actual turnout on the day. For example, academics at the LSE used British Election Studies data to assess the impact of door-to-door contact on turnout amongst those who were 'leaning' to Labour in the 2010 election. Those who were contacted by Labour at home were 21% more likely to have actually gone and voted Labour than those who received no contact at home – clear evidence of the power of the ground campaign to shift opinion.

In 2017, the Conservatives' campaign was a failure, and the results showed the size of the personal catastrophe for Theresa May: a victory very heavily disguised as a defeat; the Conservatives the largest party but losing their majority; May returned to office but not to power. It also showed the challenge facing pollsters trying to analyse how people will vote in elections.

Almost a quarter of Labour's voters decided they would support the party in the final week of the election, with 12% deciding on election day itself.
Nearly all pollsters in 2017 picked up the shift in opinion during the election, albeit not all anticipated the race to be so close in the end. With campaigns having such a dramatic impact and with voters so fluid in their support, 'predicting' voter behaviour is a less than perfect science.

The US election in 2016 was also high on drama and with the result that surprised the world. Some of this was caused by pollsters failing to foresee Trump's victory. US pollster Frank Luntz wasn't alone in calling the election for Hillary very early on. Before midnight on election night, he tweeted: 'Hillary Clinton will be the next President of the United States.' By 06:00, he had admitted he called it wrong. Afterwards, US pollsters began a period of soul-searching, looking at how their estimates could have been inaccurate. Some highlighted the challenge of reaching certain demographics in their samples. It seems a large number of white, working-class voters were underrepresented in their surveys, and a big proportion of these voted for Trump.

However, just as in the UK, it was also the campaign that shifted opinion and made it much more difficult to predict. In the 2012 Obama vs Romney race, only 4% of voters said they were still undecided on election day. In 2016, this number had risen to 14%, and 2 to 1 of these voters broke for Trump. Democratic pollsters have admitted their algorithms failed to anticipate the extent that independent voters would turn to Trump. Moreover, the final days of the campaign contained revelations which moved voter opinion late on in a way that was almost impossible for the pollsters to predict. 11 days before the election, James Comey sent a letter to Congress which implied the investigation into Hillary Clinton's use of a private email server was to be reopened.

US polling expert Nate Silver wrote that this event was enough to swing the result for Trump: 'At a minimum, its impact might have been only a percentage point or so. Still, because Clinton lost Michigan, Pennsylvania, and Wisconsin by less than 1%, the letter was probably enough to change the outcome of the Electoral College'.

> "There's room for a bit more modesty in the industry about the challenges of getting this right every time."

Where do these races leave political polling?

First, there is undoubtedly still room for improvement in the methodologies and sampling used by political pollsters. Despite the fact that many pollsters called the races close to the margin of error and identified the key trends in the campaign, there still needs to be a redoubling of effort on the part of the polling industry to build sampling methodologies that truly capture the complexity of voter opinion.

Second, it would be great if political pollsters reflected a little more humbly on their predictive powers. Lord Ashcroft, who has transformed UK polling by conducting large scale surveys in the public domain, always repeats the mantra: 'a poll is a snapshot, not a prediction'. Others would do well to remember this. There are now ever more sophisticated polling models being built to anticipate election results, and at each election, one firm is able to proudly declare their model the winner. I think we should applaud not begrudge each success. However, they also need to recognise the pace of social and political change is such that their model is likely to be outdated before the time of the next election. There's room for a bit more modesty in the industry about the challenges of getting this right every time.

Finally, it's time to rethink the cosy relationship between polling companies and the media. In April 2015, on the basis of a series of small shifts in the polls, The Guardian splashed across its front page: 'The day the polls turned'. The polls were supposedly evidence of a big shift towards Ed Miliband and Labour in the 2015 election. Unfortunately, the headline was misleading, and the big swing to Labour didn't exist.

You can blame the pollsters in 2015 for overstating Labour's lead in their samples, but some responsibility needs to rest with the pollsters who do media surveys and the journalists themselves for sensationalising small movements within data, often falling with the margin of error. In complex elections, covering 650 separate electoral fights, a single 1,000 person survey is a very poor means of anticipating the overall result and pretending otherwise does neither the media nor the polling industry any favours. I'm all for public polling in elections, but it would be better to have a smaller number of bigger surveys, with more effort put into them being drawn from a sample that reflects the complex diversity of opinion in each country. It would also be better if the results were reported both accurately and in more hushed tones.

This is because campaigns do make a difference. Voters are becoming more undecided and liable to change their mind, at the same time that campaign techniques are becoming more sophisticated and able to connect in a more targeted way with different voter groups.

Frankly, there's no opinion poll methodology that can anticipate all eventualities. A little more humbleness by pollsters in reflecting polling's limitations and a bit more rigour in the media about what the data means would serve us all well.

Dr. Matt Carter MPRCA is the Founder and Managing Director of Message House, former Chief Executive, UK, of Burson-Marsteller, former Chairman and Managing Director of Penn Schoen Berland, and was General Secretary of the Labour Party. He has a doctorate in Politics.

Emma Pointer MPRCA

What we need to learn from the role of social media in the 2015 General Election

For businesses and consultancies interested in understanding the nuances of elections, the role that different media channels and engagement techniques play in driving voter behaviour is a source of persistent fascination. In recent years, this fascination has focused increasingly on social media, with each election or referendum bringing more claims about the role it plays in shaping voter intention.

The 2015 General Election was no different, with many commentators predicting that it would be the UK's first social media election. In light of the widespread failure across the political and communications sector to predict the outcome of some recent election results, what can we learn from voter engagement with social media? And specifically, relating to the 2015 General Election, what role did it play?

There are two aspects to any consideration of the role of social media during an election campaign. First, how do voters use it and therefore how useful is it as a barometer of public sentiment? Specifically, how do conversations and activity taking place on social media enhance our understanding of voting intentions?

Secondly, how are political parties using social media to enhance their campaign and reach target voters? How successful are they at achieving this and to what extent does the approach of political parties in their online campaign reinforce or influence the way voters use social media? Additionally, if highly targeted content is being directed at voters online (where only those targeted can see it), does this affect our assessment of the reach of parties' respective campaigns? Understanding different types of media and their role in influencing voters is complicated and there are some interrelated factors which drive voter behaviour; it's unlikely that any analysis could ever isolate one individual factor. However, understanding the role social media played in the 2015 General Election - how it affected voter attitudes and engagement - might help our understanding of industry perceptions and predictions of the election.

> "While users may think they are being presented with a wide variety of viewpoints, the reality is that they are actually being exposed to an often highly narrow set of views."

Role of social media

The declining role of television and the print media is frequently part of this discussion. And, while it is true that newspaper circulation figures have been falling steadily for a number of years now, and television channels are facing increasing competition from online video platform streaming services (a trend particularly prevalent with young people), the influence of traditional media has not waned completely, particularly during election periods.

For many voters, traditional media still plays a significant role in driving awareness and shaping their attitudes, and ultimate voting intention. Various polls have shown that television still leads as the medium most likely to grab voters' attention and influence their voting decision, with radio and newspapers close behind.

Where does social media fit in this equation then? As the polls show, in 2015 it did play a more significant role than in previous elections, but it was still only seen as likely to grab the attention of a fifth of voters. However, the picture is more nuanced than these figures initially suggest. Regarding influence, 38% of voters thought the information they had received through social media would influence their voting decision. This indicates that social media does play a role in shaping attitudes and opinions, once engagement has been achieved. This compared to the influence of doorstep canvassing (at 33%) suggests that some may have underestimated the impact of social media campaigns during the 2015 General Election, as is explored below.

How voters use social media

Much has been written about the way consumers and voters use social media and its growing popularity. However, the analysis shows that it is not growing in popularity uniformly, with a significant discrepancy in the activity of different political groups. The concept of 'shy Tories' (now widely acknowledged and

accounted for in polling methods since the 1992 election) may also be present online with a study by Global Web Index finding that supporters of Labour (particularly Labour's left), the SNP (nicknamed 'Cybernats'), and the Green Party were far more active. Not only are left-wing supporters more active on social media, but they were also present in larger numbers than Conservative voters. This may have presented an image of stronger support for the left-wing during the campaign. In reality, the online conversation was more likely to be heavily skewed than representative of the reality on the ground.

This may have given political commentators and communications professionals (also a group that is highly likely to be active on social media) a false picture of the strength of support for Labour, which served to reinforce analysis of the polling picture that was emerging. This suggests that social media was a poor barometer of voting intention.

Other evidence suggests that algorithms behind different social media platforms may create 'filter bubbles' which mean users constantly see content that is similar to that which they have already seen or interacted with, creating a constantly reinforcing environment. Furthermore, back in 2015, awareness of the way platforms operated was low, many users thought they saw content from their friends or followers organically when in fact that content had been carefully selected.

The growing popularity of user-generated content (such a gifs or memes) may have helped this illusion, as well as the increasing 'white-labelling' of media content shared on platforms (whereby users do not leave the platform to view content, which may be presented in a way that does not make it clear which outlet it is from). While users may think they are being presented with a wide variety of viewpoints, the reality is that they are actually being exposed to an often highly narrow set of views. The discrepancy between this perception and the reality may have played a large part in delivering the unexpected outcome of the election, both in terms of influencing voter intentions, and in overstating the support for particular parties or groups.

How parties use social media

Some have argued that while political parties did make tentative attempts to engage with voters via social media channels, their attempts lacked imagination and tended to be focused on broadcasting party messages rather than creating dialogue, as well as failing to recognise that social media is a distinct channel from more traditional forms of media and therefore requires a different sort of message.

This, it has been suggested, created the effect of preaching to the converted meaning that a high level of social media spend may not have translated into new votes. However, the Conservatives did have a significantly higher volume of spending than Labour, despite using similar techniques online. These adverts were often highly targeted, focused on swing voters in marginal seats. However, the nature of online targeting means that these adverts aren't always visible to wider audiences, and particularly the media, to scrutinise either content or spend. This means the scale of the Conservatives' operation went unnoticed until their spend was declared to the Electoral Commission. Subsequent analysis has suggested that this approach was a determining factor in the Conservatives' success but at the time this was apparent to other parties or political commentators, adding to the element of surprise when the result was revealed.

Conclusion

The Conservatives were quicker to recognise the power of social media to engage voters. In particular, they focused on Facebook to target marginal seats outside of London meaning this was less likely to be seen by journalists, communications, and political professionals. This, coupled with the changing nature of voter behaviour online with the growth in content shared organically, means it is probably fair to conclude that social media did play a substantial role in this election. However, the nature of social media and the way users are likely to be surrounded by other users or content with similar view points (either through choice or algorithms) meant that its role was easily overlooked. For many, it often served to reinforce their existing viewpoint both in terms of political party support and analysis of which direction the election was heading.

Recommendations

1. No media, channel, or engagement technique can be assessed in isolation but should be viewed as part of the wider picture of engagement during a campaign – a snapshot of public opinion at a given time, rather than a definite indicator of results.

2. Those making political predictions should be aware of the effect of the 'echo chamber' or 'filter bubbles', particularly in their network, and understand that this may present them with a distorted view of political support and engagement.

3. Understanding how different demographics of voters use social media and how present they are across different channels is key to considering how useful a barometer social media is during an election campaign.

4. The way we use social media (and our understanding of the way we use social media) continues to evolve – any analysis of social media should factor this.

5. When assessing the impact of online content, it is important to remember that not all content has the same influence on voter engagement or sentiment – organic content is likely to be far more effective at driving voter behaviour than targeted adverts.

Emma Pointer MPRCA is an Account Director at Weber Shandwick and Vice-chairman of the PRCA Public Affairs and Lobbying Group.

"Not only are left-wing supporters more active on social media, but they were also present in larger numbers than Conservative voters."

'Forecast late, forecast often'. This was a quote (albeit in jest) from my electoral behaviour lecturer; the suggestion being that if you're going to get into the business of making political predictions leave it as close to election day as possible and the more predictions you make, the more likely it is you're going to get one that's in the right ball-park. Unfortunately, most political pundits can't get away with leaving it until the last minute, and you're not going to be taken very seriously if you take a scatter gun approach to your predictions. Politics over the last couple of years seems to have become very difficult to predict with several events not only surprising 'the pundits' but also catching key political players off-guard.

This has caused many to ask why the pollsters have got it wrong (again…), with the House of Lords the latest to announce an inquiry into polling, and organisations like the PRCA asking the question: how does this affect our work and the way in which we advise our clients? Many political commentators have, understandably, become wary of predicting anything, myself included. A PhD in voting behaviour, nearly ten years working in research and opinion polling and 20 years' experience of being actively involved in campaigning have not left me immune from the dangers of trying to predict what might happen in the topsy-turvy world of politics that we are now living through. In this piece, I'm going to address the problem of predicting political behaviour by looking at the question of what we need to do to understand political behaviour.

Once upon a time, predicting how someone would vote was easy. In Britain, social class was a clear predictor of voting behaviour, with the working class traditionally backing Labour and the middle and upper classes supporting the Conservative Party.

Albeit not a perfect predictor (one-third of the working class consistently voted for the Conservatives) it was strong enough to build a reliable model of vote choice. Coupled with strong levels of party identification, an attachment to a political party (not the same as the actual vote choice itself), which often ran through generations of families, it was much easier to predict how someone would vote than it is today. At present, social class is a far muddier concept than it once was and, certainly judging by the last election, if any socio-demographic feature have become a big predictor of vote choice it's age and education. Voters are far more discerning about how they will vote, with fewer expressing strong levels of identification with a political party than they once did.

"The seminal text, *The American Voter*, presented a model of voting behaviour which became known as 'the funnel of causality'. As with any model, it is a simplification of the complexity of real life."

The seminal text, *The American Voter*, presented a model of voting behaviour which became known as 'the funnel of causality'. As with any model, it is a simplification of the complexity of real life. Nevertheless, it is helpful for thinking about all the possible factors that might influence a voter when deciding how to cast their vote. On the far left, at the mouth of the funnel, we have influences such as socio-demographics, for example, age, gender, and ethnicity. We also have social factors, for example, class and education. As we move through the funnel, we have values and the groups that we may encounter as part of our social circles. All these things may lead the voter to form an attachment to a political party. As we get closer to the vote decision, opinions about specific issues or candidates could come into play. Around the outside of the funnel, we have external factors, such as campaigning by parties, the media, family, and friends as well as more general political and/or economic conditions.

Although the funnel of causality was developed decades ago, it can help us visualise what happened during the recent General Election. If we assume the left-hand side of the funnel represents the early to mid-part of the campaign, the right-hand side, from campaign activity and the influence of friends and family, represents the second half of the campaign when things started to change. Theresa May called the election when the polls were looking strong for the relatively new Prime Minister and her own personal ratings very favourable indeed, particularly in comparison to the ratings of the opposition leader Jeremy Corbyn.

Dr. Jansev Jemal

Paradigm shifts and expecting the unexpected

May's team were so confident that a presidential campaign was developed that put her at the heart of the campaign. Some bold decisions were taken that arguably proved fatal and contributed to the reversal of fortune for May. A big one was the party manifesto. Devised with her closest advisers and a handful of ministers, it contained some brave proposals that would help the party in its efforts to bring down the deficit but would be to the detriment of older people, a group whose support that the party had always been able to rely on. What became known as the dementia tax was very quick to resonate with voters and, I know anecdotally, was cited as a possible reason why traditional Conservative voters might for the first time move away from the party. On reflection, another mistake was perhaps not showing up for the leaders debate, instead sending Amber Rudd, who had only recently lost her father. May's decline mirrored the rise of Jeremy Corbyn, who is stronger out on the campaign trail rather than in the House of Commons.

So, the funnel of causality helps to visualise all the different factors that impact on the vote. On the face of it, the model appears to be a good model of voting behaviour. If we can build a good model, why are we still, on occasions, getting it so wrong? Firstly, measurement is not easy. The model implies the need to take into account a lot of different factors. Some of these may be more or less important than others and different analysts will assign varying levels of significance to each one. Furthermore, isolating the impact of any one factor is very difficult.

My research was driven by the desireto understand the effects of local campaigning by political parties, particularly in the context of other types of communication channels such as television, newspapers, and literature. But trying to isolate the effects of each one is a real challenge, exacerbated by the fact that this doesn't take into account other types of communications such as family and friends. If I were repeating the research today, it would have to take into account social media. At this point, we also need to remember that it is political opinion polls, not academic research that we look to for an idea of the election result and the two are different in some key respects.

Whereas an academic might build a model of voting behaviour to predict how someone will vote, an opinion poll is a snapshot of opinion at a particular point in time. They are not designed to predict the outcome of an election, though people often use opinion polls to do just that. Another key way in which opinion polls are different from academic research is that the former will be published on a regular basis throughout the campaign. During the referendum on Scottish independence, YouGov published a poll showing that the vote for independence was moving ahead of staying in the union.

This may well have galvanised the campaign for remaining in the union and ultimately influenced the outcome of the election, though this is very difficult to prove. Interestingly, the same pollster – YouGov – has developed a methodology involving the use of statistical modelling more akin to that we would normally use in the academic arena. YouGov found themselves on the defensive when the model was launched forecasting a hung parliament. This was very much out of line with what other pollsters were suggesting. YouGov's model, with its overall forecast and prediction for individual seats, were vindicated on the night of the election. It will be interesting to see if other pollsters will feel the need to employ more advanced statistical techniques in order to be able to compete with the move in this direction.

The world of politics is fascinating. It has usually been the case that the best predictor of the future is the past. But our ability to forecast what is happening in the world of politics has been made more difficult by the rapid pace of change we have seen in many quarters, whether we are talking about young people in Britain being inspired to register and vote in numbers not seen before, a complete novice entering the US presidential race, or the birth and rise of a new political party in France sweeping away the establishment to take the French presidency. Established norms are being ripped up. For the commentators who seek to understand that change and try to bravely pre-empt what might happen next perhaps the best advice may be to keep an open mind, try to see where the paradigmatic shifts may be coming from and expect the unexpected.

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Marshall Manson MPRCA

Closing the gap starts with recognising that London is the outlier

The last 18 months have been a roller coaster for the UK. Brexit. Article 50. The High Court. The snap election. The landslide that wasn't. USA Top Trumps. And countless other moments, large and small, that would have seemed unthinkable a few years ago. The only certainty is uncertainty. And political leaders seem to be struggling more than anyone to get to grips with the implications.

The chasm between the establishment and anti-establishment arguably hasn't been this wide since the French Revolution. And with every passing day, it only seems to grow. This yawning gap in British society is hugely problematic for communications and public affairs experts based in London. And more than a year after the Brexit result shocked London - we still have a lot to learn.

It starts here. We need to recognise that we live and work in a bubble and that our perceptions are shaped and informed by people living and working in the same bubble. As a result, our instincts about Britain can be wildly miscalibrated, and that means our judgement must be treated as suspect. Put another way, there's the world beyond the M25, and it doesn't look the way we think it does. London is the outlier.

Consider these points from an Ogilvy PR survey:

- 61% of non-Londoners do not believe that people who live in London share their values.
- 54% say that Londoners don't have the same view of what it means to be British as they do.
- 47% believe that people in London do not want what's best for Britain's future.
- And an amazing 86% of non-Londoners said that London gets too much of the pie.

Non-Londoners are also significantly more distrustful of Westminster politicians, business leaders, and national newspapers than people who live in London. Sitting in our ivory towers on the banks of the Thames, we try to develop ideas that will connect our clients and organisations with audiences across Britain. Sometimes we have real successes. At our best, we make valuable contributions to the wider dialogue, challenge thinking, and help society progress.

But too often, our work is based on insights that are too Shoreditch and too rooted in a worldview that's either unfamiliar or uncomfortable to people beyond the M25. At its worst, the attitudes reflected in our work can be superior, preachy, and hopelessly disconnected from real life.

Consider the recent General Election. In the old days, the 'wisdom' of the lobby was bad enough. Groupthink among political journalists, ex-MPs, and other hangers-on helped shape narratives that were occasionally misleading, but routinely navel-gazing – relevant only to residents of the Westminster Village. Twitter has made that echo chamber both larger and more efficient, as the lobby conversation plays on regardless of whether the participants are physically present or not. Meanwhile, breakthroughs in behavioural science have taught us to question our observations. So the political class ignores its observations from the streets, the doors, the diners, and the barbershops in favour of hard data. But the data is polluted by groupthink too, as pollsters gather around the consensus.

And so the narrative emerges: a Tory landslide is on the cards! And influences election coverage directly and subtly throughout the campaign. It's wrong. But it shapes strategic decision-making; where parties commit resources; how the news covers the campaign; and it all amounts to a massive disservice to the British public – most of whom live beyond the M25.

To be clear, data is a potent, valuable force, and communications and public affairs professionals have been too slow to bring data into our day to day work. As a result, our strategies are vulnerable to the whims of anecdote, suspicion, and intuition. The results we report wind up woolly, opinionated, and hopeful. But for data to be effective, it must be met in equal measures by common sense and experience. Blind faith in numbers is a recipe for embracing error and discovering only dead ends.

Allen Jonathan and Amie Parnes explore this at length in *Shattered*, their book chronicling Hillary Clinton's losing campaign for President. They recount the constant push and pull between Clinton's young disciples of data and her old hands who couldn't shake the feeling that something wasn't right. The conflict between the camps persisted through the whole campaign until the pigeons came home to roost on election night. But to conclude that Clinton lost because her data team got it wrong is to miss the far more important learning: data works, but it needs to be paired with a wide range of observations and an open mind.

Living in any bubble – whether it's London, Paris, New York, or the one that the Facebook algorithm created for us – guarantees confirmation bias, drives us towards more extreme views, and creates gaps between us and the rest of society that can be hard to overcome. To truly connect with Britain, we need more thinking from Bristol and Belfast, Manchester and Macclesfield, Swansea and Sheffield, and Perth and Plymouth. In practice, that means putting more

miles on our cars and fewer on our keyboards. We need to get out of the office and out of London, and spend less time with people like ourselves, and more time with people who aren't like us at all.

Last November, we started our Ogilvy On the Road programme, which requires every member of our team to spend a full day somewhere beyond the M25, and return with learnings and souvenirs to share with their colleagues and our clients.

The results have been exciting. The better breadth of inputs is yielding more compelling insights, which are driving better ideas. Our clients benefit from the results. And our team members are more comfortable chatting with strangers to get a sense of their views. Getting physically beyond the M25 is a good place to start. But, by itself, that's not enough to get beyond the London bubble. There's something else required: a curious mind, seasoned with a healthy dose of humility, and self-doubt. First, we need to question everything, starting with our own assumptions. The information we absorb, whether from traditional sources or a really interesting Reddit thread, we need to think more critically and be more open to points of view and facts that don't align with our own worldviews.

At the same time, we need to embrace humility, recognise that we don't know everything, and accept that we have a lot to learn from others. Practicing a little less certitude will make us more respectful of varying points of view. It also means listening and engaging on equal footing, rather than dismissing perspectives that we think are wrong or even backwards. A more measured give-and-take also increases the opportunity to find common ground and, ultimately, be persuasive. Practicing humility means more positive behaviour in debates and conversations. That means less name calling and fewer blithe applications of pejorative labels.

As leaders in communications, we have a responsibility to raise the level of debate and improve the quality of dialogue in our society. Getting beyond the London bubble, listening more effectively, and being less dismissive of people with contrary views will help deliver on that responsibility. It's also good business.

And that brings us to the opportunity now before us – the reason for optimism. By embracing this approach, we can help make things better. By contributing to a better dialogue, prioritising respectfulness, and telling stories that bring people together, we can help mitigate uncertainty, prevent greater division, and contribute to a future for Britain that is truly brighter.

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> 61 % of non-Londoners do not believe that people who live in London share their values. Non-Londoners are also significantly more distrustful of Westminster politicians, business leaders, and national newspapers than people who live in London.

James Endersby and Adam Drummond Research, statistics, and making political predictions

In an age where everything we do is recorded, collated, and analysed, we have become used to 'big data' knowing a lot about us. A look through a person's Amazon history can tell you more about their hobbies and lifestyle than a visit to their home. Someone's Google search history gives us a window into their thoughts via the information they look for. And of course, Google, Apple, and the others use their provision of vitally useful services (like email, maps, and calendars) to put together a complete picture of who we are and what we do.

There is an infamous story from 2012 about the US retailer Target which used purchasing patterns to be able to identify whether somebody was pregnant. Their goal was to be top of mind for mums-to-be at the crucial moment at which they realise they are pregnant and enter the market for baby-related purchases. The reason you've probably heard of this is that in one instance it resulted in a furious father of a teenage girl marching into a store angrily demanding to know why his daughter had been sent promotional materials and vouchers for nappies and prams before sheepishly calling back later with an apology.

These feats of statistical analysis are impressive, even if a little unnerving, but they now form such a big part of day-to-day life that people can be forgiven for expecting similar statistical magic when it comes to other realms of life such as politics and elections.

Although we've had opinion polls since the early-to-mid 20th century, the recent change has been from looking at individual polls, through looking at polling averages across multiple companies (to take account of various house effects and statistical noise), to sophisticated models that have polls at their core but apply a number of weights and other data to them.

Nate Silver's success in 2008, when his model successfully predicted 49 out of 50 states, is what really catapulted psephology into public consciousness. Silver's method used polls as their base, but in each state he weighted the poll results by that pollster's past performance (so a poorly performing company would be less influential than one with a record of accuracy). But he also combined this with non-poll data such as past voting trends in particular states as well as demographics and economics to put together a detailed picture of each state.

Silver had great success in 2008 and 2012 but his consolation prize in 2016 was that his estimate (a 71% chance of Hillary Clinton becoming president) was the least bullish of his competitors with the Huffington Post model, for example, giving Clinton a 98% chance.

What made Silver's 2016 prediction the least wrong was that he factored in uncertainty in a way that his rivals did not. At its core, the difference between Target predicting that a woman was pregnant before she tells anyone else, and Nate Silver predicting an election result is that we have a secret ballot. Nobody can connect your name with who you voted for in a validated way, much less do so over numerous elections in your lifetime and build up an accurate record. In polls and surveys we ask people how they voted but false recall (both deliberately and accidentally) is a major factor, as is how representative your sample is and the relative infrequency of elections.

Your Google searches and Amazon purchase history? Those are the original primary dataset with hundreds of data points. Amazon knows for a fact that you searched for these products or those products, when you did so, which other ones you looked at and which one you eventually bought. And they know that for millions and millions of people.

In contrast, surveys and polls are trying to replicate that primary dataset by asking people to remember and give us the information it contains. In contrast to the tech giants with data for what market researchers call the entire 'universe', psephologists and pollsters typically have access to a few thousand people out of an electorate containing tens, or hundreds, of millions. You would need over 200 typical polls (sample size circa 2,000) to reach 1% of the UK electorate.

This much smaller sample size and infrequency of data points mean that polls and surveys are much more susceptible to outliers than the datasets of online retailers are. If someone gives us what seems to be a strange answer for how they voted in 2015 vs. their answers for 2010 and 2017 then we may have enough other respondents to tell if this is a trend or statistical noise. If someone begins to buy a few packs of nappies or baby food, then Amazon has enough information about that person to tell if they are new parents or are being visited by new parents and can look at the circumstances of a few million other people with the same pattern to provide statistical certainty.

The method of data collection therefore by itself negates comparisons between election polling and the type of data-driven hyper-targeting that retailers and tech giants carry out.

But the public would be forgiven for not realising that there is a difference given the way that polls tend to be presented. One of the recommendations of the Sturgis report into why the polls failed to predict the 2015 election result was to include confidence intervals when reporting the numbers. E.g. Labour are on 35% which means there's a 95% chance of the 'true' result being between 33% and 37%. This assumes that the sampling is completely representative which is a challenge in and of itself but one that the polling industry is well aware

of. As things are though, figures are presented as being fixed and accurate down to several decimal places, instead of being more of an indicator of where things stand at a given point in time in a fluctuating situation.

Another thing that is perhaps a quirk of the way that British polls are reported is that the published figures almost never include undecided voters and thus fail to give an indication of how the figures may change as more people decide how to vote. Our post-election mass survey to anyone who took part in one of our voting intention polls found that those who decided how to vote in the final week or final month before polling day swung in Labour's direction while those who had made up their minds earlier were more solidly Conservative. This may be something the polling industry should look at, given its use in other countries. A week before the 2016 US election, Nate Silver pointed out that polling showed Trump and Clinton together taking 85% of the vote compared to 95% for Barack Obama and Mitt Romney at the same point four years earlier. This indicated that there were more undecided voters and, thus, more potential chance of an upset and perhaps if UK polls included this as standard then we might appreciate the level of uncertainty that exists.

This brings us onto the story of the 2017 General Election, the YouGov analytics model which famously predicted a hung parliament a week before the election and attempts to bridge the gap between big data and polling. The model performed extremely well on the night, identifying that seats like Canterbury would go red against all expectations. To greatly simplify how it works, the model identifies different types of voter and how many of each type are in each constituency and then putting together vast amounts of survey data of each type to be able to make estimates for each seat. The team behind it deserve all of the plaudits that they have received, particularly for all the criticism they received when first publishing. But two things stand out.

> "One of the recommendations of the Sturgis report into why the polls failed to predict the 2015 election result was to include confidence intervals when reporting the numbers. This assumes that the sampling is completely representative which is a challenge in and of itself but one that the polling industry is well aware of."

First, it's worth noting that if you had typed the actual final vote shares into electoral calculus (Martin Baxter's fabulous website that allows you to play around with different scenarios) then you would have shown a similar seat distribution. YouGov changed their method for their final poll in a way that boosted the Tory lead over Labour. If they hadn't, there's a strong chance that they would have been able to predict a hung parliament without needing to spend vast resources on an elaborate analytics model. Thus underlining the importance of doing all that we can to get that underlying data to be as accurate as possible.

The second, and the point at which to close this essay, is that the timing is slightly unfortunate. Voting is a different exercise to purchasing and the ways that we have of collecting data for voting are far less detailed than those available to retailers collecting purchasing information. Uncertainty is a reality, and a much under-appreciated one and recent experience of elections going against expectations may finally have started to get people to treat polls and predictions with appropriate caveats. It's unfortunate, in this context, that the lesson many are taking from the 2017 election appears to be 'these things are precisely predictable and here is a new magical data solution that can predict everything perfectly'.

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Lionel Zetter FPRCA

Why many of us got things wrong

Introduction

The PRCA is trying to establish why so many 'experts' have failed to accurately predict the outcome of recent political events. Personally, I called Trump, Brexit, Theresa May as PM, and a 2017 General Election date right – but like almost everybody else then predicted the result of that election wrongly. So here are my thoughts as to why so many of us have got things wrong so frequently in the last year or so.

Fighting the last war

It is a common criticism of generals that they are always fighting the last war. They look back at what worked and what did not work during previous conflicts, and then they attempt to project those lessons on to current and future wars. It would seem that political pollsters, pundits, and public affairs professionals are guilty of the same thing. We look back at previous elections – especially the most recent one – and try to shoehorn the unique circumstances of a new election into the templates of previous ones.

With that in mind, general (and party specific) shibboleths go unquestioned, and sacred cows are only slaughtered after the event - by which time it is too late. In the specific case of the 2017 General Election, a number of 'givens' turned out to be false.

Firstly, it has long been assumed that older voters will vote for the Conservatives no matter what. Following the Conservative manifesto, with its full frontal assault on the interests of pensioners, this turned out not to be the case. Faced with the threat to the 'triple lock' and to heating allowances, plus the threat to confiscate all of their assets (bar a modest £100,000) if they suffered the misfortune to fall victim to dementia, many older voters switched parties - or simply stayed at home.

Secondly, there was the assumption that younger voters do not turn out in large numbers. In previous elections, this was undoubtedly the case. Statistically, older voters (60 +) were twice as likely as younger voters (18 – 24) to turn out. What was different this time was that younger voters had been stung by the Brexit result, and had subsequently realised that if they had turned out in greater numbers, the result could have been different. There was also, of course, the small matter of the electoral bribe that the Labour Party offered in the form of their promise to scrap student tuition fees.

Thirdly, and again based on previous general elections, there was the assumption that campaigns do not significantly affect the result. This time around, the Tories started off with a 20 point-plus lead in the opinion polls and ended up with a two point lead in the actual result. This came about because Labour (and Jeremy Corbyn in particular) ran a positive and energetic campaign, and the Tories (and Theresa May in particular) ran a negative and defensive campaign.

For many reasons, but primarily these three, virtually everybody called the General Election result wrong. In particular for the pollsters – who have to weight their results according to their judgment of likelihood to actually vote – the results were almost universally disappointing.

Echo chambers and safe spaces

I have long been a critic of academia for its less than courageous and ultimately counter-productive policy of denying people it disagrees with a platform. I also disagree with the policy of providing students with 'safe spaces' where their preconceptions are immune from all forms of challenge.

I have also been critical of the public affairs industry for its propensity towards virtue signalling within self-reinforcing echo chambers. This too often leads to a failure to examine issues from all angles, and a failure to consider the possibility that, just because the vast majority of colleagues wish something to happen, it will do so. The Brexit vote and the election of Donald Trump are classic examples of this type of groupthink.

Then the 2017 General Election came along and blew a massive hole in the assumptions of the Conservative Party, the confident predictions of opinion pollsters, and my own self-belief. I subscribed to the conventional wisdom that the Tories would win comfortably and like almost everybody else was therefore surprised by the exit poll on the night and by the eventual result.

As somebody who did a great deal of doorstep campaigning during the recent campaign, I detected a distinct change of mood once the manifesto had been published – followed shortly afterwards by the u-turn and then the u-turn denial. However, since most of my campaigning was confined to Enfield and Harrow, I assumed that this was down to the fabled 'London effect'and that the Tories would do better elsewhere. In that, I was badly mistaken.

Events, dear boy, events

This famous Harold Macmillan quote referred to the perils encountered during the long process of government, rather that the vicissitudes of an election campaign lasting a matter of weeks. In the case of the 2017 General Election, however, events had a dramatic effect on the outcome.

The 2017 campaign was punctuated by two terrorist incidents which should have shifted the focus to crime and security and had the potential to put a Jeremy Corbyn-led Labour Party in a difficult position. However, Labour succeeded in placing the blame for the attacks on the Tories, citing the fact that police numbers had been cut by Theresa May while she was Home Secretary. The obvious (and truthful) response was that 'normal' crime had been falling consistently for years and that resources had been re-focused on counter-terrorism was not offered.

There can be no doubt that the Labour Party comprehensively outplayed the Tories during the campaign. Jeremy Corbyn was more energetic and engaging than Theresa May. The Labour Party manifesto was positive and offered huge (probably unaffordable) giveaways – not least to students. And the last-minute decision by Jeremy Corbyn to participate in the television debate was tactically astute; Theresa May either had to follow his lead or to remain aloof – either of which would have been damaging. If the election campaign had run for another week, Labour might well have been the largest party.

And then, of course, there was the graphic horror of Grenfell Tower where people living in a tower block in a rich Tory borough were engulfed by flames. The initial response – from the borough and the government – was leaden. If Grenfell had happened before the 8th June, Labour would probably have won outright.

Conclusion

The most obvious conclusion from all of this is that making political predictions is a mug's game.

However, whether we are pollsters, pundits, or public affairs professionals, our audiences expect us to make predictions, and they expect them to be broadly correct. We cannot simply withdraw from the predictions game because we have got something badly wrong in the past. One potential solution is to introduce a host of caveats and to make our predictions nuanced. A better solution is to try and get things right next time. Here are a few thoughts as to how we might be able to do that.

- Don't be tempted to 'fight the last war'. Approach every election (and referendum) as though it were a unique event – because it is.
- Populism is not a dirty word. It just means that a lot of people think and behave in a way which 'people like us' disagree with. It can work both ways. It is basically a revolt against elites, so if the elites are left-wing, then the revolt favours the right – and vice versa.
- Get out more. Talk to – and listen to – people down the pub and on the terraces (football, not parliamentary).
- Burst the bubble. Venture out from the close-knit circle of friends, acquaintances, and colleagues with whom you usually socialise.
- Be sociable on social media. Don't block or un-friend somebody just because their political views do not coincide with your own.
- Banish safe spaces. Invite speakers who hold unfashionable or contrary views and give them a fair hearing – before engaging in robust debate.
- Publish raw unweighted polling numbers alongside the weighted figures, so that people can make their own minds up.
- Have an open door – and an open mind. Just because somebody does not like the institutions of the EU does not necessarily make them a bad person. Just because somebody questions the causes and effects of climate change does not make them the devil incarnate.
- Let a thousand flowers bloom.

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"Don't be tempted to 'fight the last war'. Approach every election (and referendum) as though it were a unique event – because it is."

Simon Goldsworthy FPRCA

What went wrong with academic political predictions and what might be done to improve them?

The UK's Political Studies Association (PSA) regularly seeks the predictions of its specialised, largely academic membership ahead of national ballots. They were wrong about the result of the 2015 General Election, and were wrong again in 2017, while in 2016 almost 9 out of 10 of the 500 academics who responded predicted a Remain victory in the EU referendum. Academics are very far from being alone in their failure to foresee results, but clearly something is amiss – so why is this happening; is it linked to a wider problem within academia; and what can be done to improve matters?

Academics presumably rely on the same raw material as other experts when it comes to election predictions – namely opinion polls (these days with rather varied findings…), along with a few other straws in the wind, such as local election results. Given that these indicators have often proved to be false friends for all experts, even seasoned political activists, it's worth considering what value academics can add.

One promising area is turnout, which seems to be rearing its head as the crucial imponderable in elections. After all, this is something that only reveals itself on the day. Pollsters struggle to determine who really will - or will not – vote. It seems that a failure to predict turnout – not just overall, but by different categories of voters, and by locality – has made a decisive contribution to recent electoral surprises.
For example, one telling finding of the PSA's survey before the 2016 EU Referendum was that academics anticipated a turnout of 61% - below the average for recent general elections – when in fact it was just over 72%.

The underreported truth about the referendum is that differential turnout probably determined the result: potential voters in Remain areas were on average less enthusiastic than those in Leave ones. In the aftermath of the result we were frequently reminded that the Scots and Northern Irish voted to remain but were seldom reminded that, of voters in those two countries, only 67% and 63% respectively bothered to vote, as compared with 73% in pro-Leave England and 72% in pro-Leave Wales. Glasgow may have voted overwhelmingly for Remain, but only 56% of its voters took part. The most pro-Leave area in the UK, Boston in Lincolnshire, witnessed a 77% turnout, whereas the turnout in England's most pro-Remain area, Lambeth, was 68%. Turnout in London, the only one of England's official regions to vote Remain, was below average.

In a national referendum, there's little point in winning a larger proportion of the votes in particular localities if the absolute numbers are stacking up the other way. In the case of general elections, predicting the impact of turnout, split between 650 separate constituencies, is intricate but vital work to which academics could contribute. For example, could they have anticipated the impact of an increased youth vote in 2017? Did slightly fewer older voters turnout for the Conservatives following the difficulties during the campaign (after all, overall turnout was only 2.6% higher in 2017 than in 2015)?

However, the contribution academics could make to predicting results will be hindered if they are unfamiliar with or out of sympathy with large swathes of voters. The (Times Higher) surveys before both recent general elections found strong support for Labour, considerable support for the Greens, and all-but negligible support for the Conservatives among UK academics; there was hardly any support for UKIP in 2015 at a time when the party attracted more votes than the Liberal Democrats and Greens combined. A similar survey found that almost 9 out of 10 academics opposed Brexit in 2016 – perhaps one reason they were unwilling or unable to acknowledge the greater enthusiasm for Vote Leave. There is also anecdotal evidence. We know of a well-known VC who proudly told his staff that he didn't know of anyone who supported Leave. At Sussex University they have discussed how to deal with 'right-wing' attitudes in the classroom, while at Cambridge a don staged a nude protest against Brexit (try to imagine the opposite occurring).

Sometimes it seems contemporary academics have retreated into a world of their own, a trend exacerbated by the extensive use of social media, which enable them to inhabit virtual gated communities, with an increasingly uniform worldview with only nuances of difference allowed. In the case of the EU Referendum, there was a sense that universities, with so many staff and students from other EU countries (and such great hopes of continued EU links and funding), lost touch with the society in which they are based. While in the run-up to the 2017 general election there was much hopeful chatter about a possible progressive alliance made up of the sort of parties that academics favour – Labour, the Greens, LibDems, and the SNP – less attention was given to the way former UKIP voters were heading. Real opportunities to do better exist.

As the local and regional media struggle to make ends meet and shrink back towards a few major cities, they are losing the ability to undertake a proper analysis of local and regional political

> To add value, universities need to come down from their ivory towers and speak to a wider variety of people in their areas.

currents. Market research is similarly, and overwhelmingly, masterminded in London. In contrast, universities are spread across the length and breadth of the UK. They may be predominantly in large towns, cities, and conurbations, but there is now hardly a county without a university. They can be found in all kinds of areas: poor and prosperous; with high and low numbers of immigrants; and with large and small numbers of graduates. So, in a changing political world which is marked by strong regional differences, academic experts dotted around the country should be uniquely placed to consider local variations in the political currents – whether that be the Tory resurgence in Scotland, Labour excelling itself in London, or the LibDem disappointments in their former West Country heartlands.

So what solutions can be offered?

Universities would understandably resent formal interference in their affairs, but that does not preclude making helpful suggestions. It would surely be a good thing for universities to open themselves up to a wider range of views. There is a danger of groupthink: even the best ideas need to be continually tested by being subjected to alternative arguments and evidence. This improvement could be achieved by bringing in more guest speakers with a wider range of experience and different perspectives, and expanding reading lists to include more viewpoints with which academics disagree. This might have the useful side-effect of making university debates less predictable.

This should involve engaging with a range of local and regional views. To add value, universities need to come down from their ivory towers and speak to a wider variety of people in their areas. Sometimes university towns have become political islands – as Norwich and Exeter did during the EU Referendum. What about hearing from perfectly legal organisations which are viewed with distaste on campuses? Universities can be surprisingly intolerant places: a coalition of academic hostility, student union no-platforming, and 'security' concerns must not be allowed to stifle debate.

When UKIP was making so much of the political weather in Britain, its spokespeople were rarely given a hearing in higher education. Joseph Conlon, a right-of-centre pro-Brexit Oxford professor, has highlighted this decline into creeping intellectual paralysis: 'The danger…is that you create a culture which says people who are not part of the majority view are implicitly or explicitly not welcome…Think of the history of Oxford and Cambridge. There are long periods of a couple of hundred years when nothing interesting at all is happening – when they were basically Anglican seminaries reflecting an inner-looking orthodoxy. Then, they were not performing their duties as universities. There is a similar danger nowadays, where we just have everyone thinking the same way.'

Or, as Bill Rammell, a former Labour minister for higher education and now Vice-Chancellor of the University of Bedfordshire, said in the wake of the referendum result, there was 'a real and significant burden on universities to take a more substantial role in civil society, rebuilding public trust through active engagement'.

The temptation among academics to use ex officio social media accounts for political campaigning and invective must also be guarded against. What they do outside the workplace is up to them, but universities do not exist, and are not funded, to serve as political campaigning organisations. People may be relaxed about this if they are in sympathy with the views expressed, but a good way of testing this proposition is to imagine how you'd feel if a large number of academics espoused, in their professional capacities, political viewpoints which, although legal, you strongly oppose, or even find repugnant. How would you feel about their ability to empathise with others in their professional work?

The simple truth is that universities that work harder to understand the societies which they serve will be better placed to predict our political future. And those universities which fail to open themselves up to society must accept that that's a legitimate subject of concern: once universities start to think that they might damage their reputations and lose good students, and perhaps even donations and research funding, they might start to think again.

This paper takes account of helpful suggestions made by Richmond professors Trevor Morris and Tim Evans and external guests at a Richmond University seminar on 11th April, 2017, some of which appeared in a Higher Education Policy Institute blogpost.

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Martha Dalton CMPRCA

Populism and political predictions – what's that coming over the hill?

'There suddenly upon a ridge appeared a rider, clad in white, shining in the rising sun. Over the low hills the horns were sounding. Behind him, hastening down the long slopes, were a thousand men on foot; their swords were in their hands. Amid them strode a man tall and strong. His shield was red. As he came to the valley's brink, he set to his lips a great black horn and blew a ringing blast.'

The 2017 election confounded commentators, politicians, and experts alike. Almost no one successfully predicted that Theresa May would lose seats, let alone that she would be stripped of her overall majority. Jeremy Corbyn's remarkable successes in both defending and acquiring seats came as a surprise – most of all to those paid to understand politics.

Coming hot on the heels of a series of electoral upsets - Brexit and Trump, chief amongst them – the 2017 result has led to a great deal of soul-searching amongst the political commentariat across a range of apparently distinct themes: populism, turnout, polling, and globalisation are all under the microscope. For public affairs professionals it is tempting, sometimes, to leave causal analyses to the academics and to focus on the impact of politics – what will Brexit mean for client X, how should client Y deal with the possibility of a Corbyn government? That is necessary, of course, but at Lodestone, we pride ourselves on helping our clients and partners to see beyond the immediate and to consider the upstream factors that shape the political environment in the long term.

That is why, over the last five years, we have funded and undertaken research on patterns in the behaviour and views of non-voters in the UK – a group that I believe hold many of the answers to the knotty conundrums that recent elections have posed for our political class.

The truth is that populism, turnout, and the collapse of the 'expert prediction' in recent years are not unrelated factors in our new political reality – they are deeply interconnected. If we are to understand the rise of populism in the UK and beyond, and to get to the heart of why the old rules of political predictions are failing, it is vital that we understand the group that is driving these changes – non-voters.

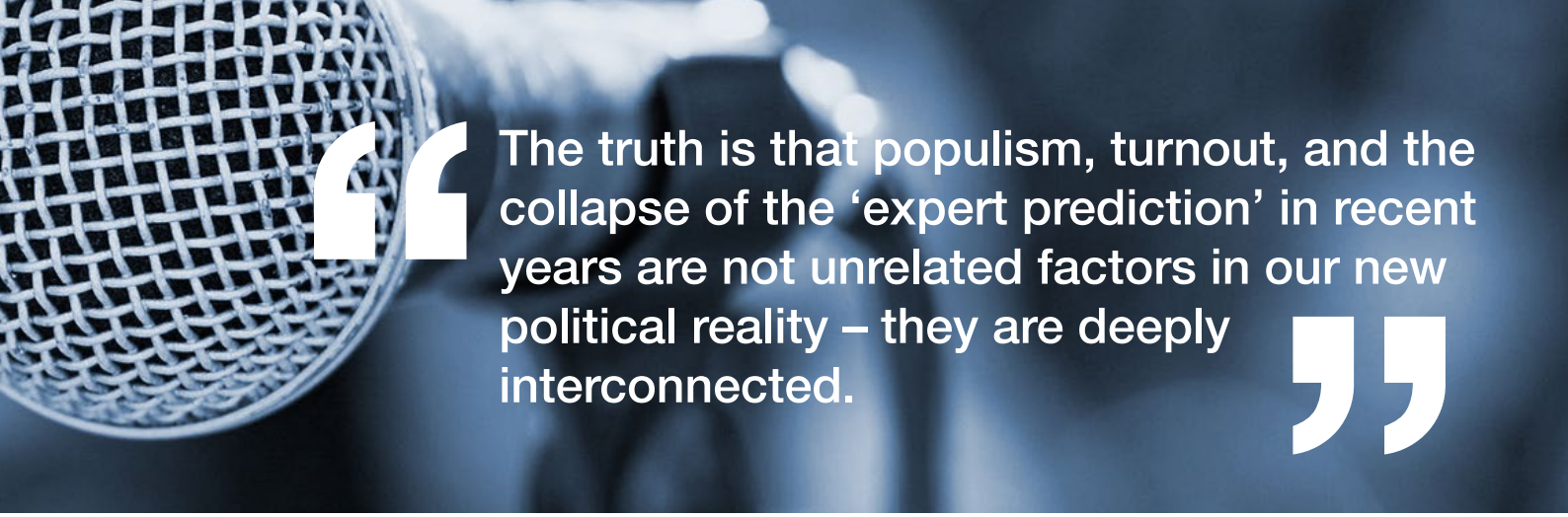
The Lodestone non-voters survey, prepared by Survation in 2013, polled over 2,000 voters and non-voters to give us an insight into why some people don't vote. 'Non-voters' in the research were defined as those who didn't vote in the 2010 election, including 'new voters' who were too young, or who were ineligible to vote at that time. We are in the process of commissioning an update of the research. When asked about why they didn't vote, the majority of non-voters said that they didn't believe their vote would make a difference or that they believed that all the parties and candidates were the same. Many non-voters told us that they felt politicians were 'out of touch', with one Conservative-leaning HGV driver from Wiltshire saying, 'I don't think they [politicians] try hard enough to understand what it is to be an average person in the community.' In our research, 86% of non-voters said that they didn't trust politicians to tell the truth, indicating that bridging the trust gap would be a significant challenge for the future.

These findings show us that non-voters have felt deeply disengaged from our politics (as you might expect) and that they are particularly concerned about the convergence between the main parties that was a feature of first Blairism and then Cameronism. As the Labour and Conservative parties moved intentionally towards the 'centre', so many whose political instincts lie further to the periphery gave up on voting or activism on the premise that it made little difference to policy, no matter who won. Non-voting went up – in part for these reasons – but so, over this period, did support for smaller parties. At one time or another the Liberal Democrats, Scottish National Party, and UKIP were all beneficiaries of this trend. The major parties resembled one another closely on matters of policy and left many millions of voters to either withhold their vote altogether or to lend it, in protest, to smaller and third parties.

One consequence of this withdrawal was that those whose jobs depend on making political predictions had their lives made relatively easier. The likely outcome of an election could be determined on a narrower set of factors – the personal polling scores of leaders relative to one another becoming ever more important, for example. Rather than a complex interaction between key individuals, key policies, and wider trends across the economy and labour market, elections could be imagined to be a straightforward battle of presentation. If it makes little difference which party governs - when it comes to economic management, policy priorities, or attitudes to particular groups in society - then it makes sense to decide between the parties on the basis of the character and temperament of who leads them.

It is the backlash against this model of politics that has given us the populism – of left and of right – that has come as such an unwelcome surprise to political commentators. The Brexit vote was marked by huge numbers of non-voters re-entering the electorate in order to make their voices heard; the result was a shock to many 'experts', and a stark defeat for the bulk of our political class, or 'anywhere' people as defined by David Goodhart. So, too, was the 2017 result.

Jeremy Corbyn successfully re-engaged many people who had declined to vote in the past three or four elections and used his brand of populism to attract young voters in record numbers. He broke the centrist mould by reaching beyond the standard battlegrounds of UK politics and striking a pose that conflicted with our accepted models of leadership and sound campaign management. The 2017 election saw the highest turnout (68.7%) in the UK since 1997 (71.4%) and saw a wholesale return to 'two-party' politics, with many switching back from third



> The truth is that populism, turnout, and the collapse of the 'expert prediction' in recent years are not unrelated factors in our new political reality – they are deeply interconnected.

parties to one of the big two. This was a result of a campaign that looked and sounded unlike any that we have experienced in those twenty years.

This is why making predictions is harder when populists are in play. Had the electorate resembled more closely the one fashioned by two decades of centrism then it is likely that the result would have more closely resembled the one expected by experts and campaign professionals alike. But it did not. Jeremy Corbyn and Theresa May both broke many of the rules of the Blair-Cameron playbook. They fought campaigns which were designed to reconnect their parties with neglected groups; May's emphasis on Brexit and grammar schools, Corbyn's on redistribution and inequality. Both parties' vote share rose as a result and millions went to the ballot for either the first time or for the first time in decades. This also represents (at least) a pause in the gentrification of politics.

The Blairite project in Labour was to reach out to the middle classes on the basis that loyal, working-class voters would stay put out of collective loyalty. It worked, but it lost him five million voters over his period in office. In many ways, Theresa May's campaign was Blairism mirrored. She sought (and won) a new working class mandate for conservatism while hoping that she would hold on (by right, almost) to those middle-class voters who had supported Cameron. May increased her party's share of C2DE voters by 12 points. She succeeded in smashing the old class cleavage that kept the Tories out of play in seats like Mansfield. But she lost to Corbyn swathes of liberal middle-class voters in previous fortress seats such as Canterbury. We may be seeing the beginning of one of British politics' occasional great shifts – with degree educated voters and public sector voters cementing behind Labour while the skilled working class turn Tory.

Populism has been deployed in British politics, by both sides, in an effort to re-engage voters lost and voters who never were. The good news is that it has worked. Theresa May and Jeremy Corbyn both used populist messaging and policy (be it crushing the 'saboteurs of Brexit' or breaking a 'rigged system set up by the wealth extractors, for the wealth extractors') and they both benefited from doing so. The Conservative Party may have suffered a humiliating seat-by-seat disappointment, but they enjoyed their highest vote share since 1983; Corbyn may not be Prime Minister but he rides a wave of momentum that few thought possible when the snap election was called. Does this mean that those of us in the political predictions game should bet the house on populism for the foreseeable? Not quite.

Party leaders and political pundits alike should caution themselves with the following facts, highlighted by Lodestone's work on non-voters. One, non-voters are erratic. This is a group who have walked away from politics or from their party of choice before – they can, and will, do so again. Neither May nor Corbyn should consider the non-voters who turned out at the last minute to rescue their political fortunes as, in any way, 'banked'. Political parties of all stripes need to ensure they take the time to understand their supporters, listen to them, and not take them for granted. We hope that our updated research into non-voters will support this effort.

Two, they are vulnerable. Overwhelmingly, non-voters are less economically secure than those who are routinely engaged in politics. Their relative insecurity and historic lack of rewards under centrist governments is part of the reason that this group has been attracted by big, populist changes such as Brexit or a Corbyn Government. But it also means that they will be the first victims and hardest hit should either of these adventures go wrong. Populist governments do not have a glistening track record for economic or political management – should Brexit for example end in ruin, their supporters will be left angrier and more disengaged than before.

Finally, they are in decline. There are similarities between non-voters and young voters; both are less reliable when it comes to turn-out, both are inclined to big and bold changes and are frustrated with our old political certainties, and both were tempted to the ballot box in 2017 in unprecedented numbers. But there are differences too. While younger voters are open to the hopeful and idealistic notions of Corbyn's Labour Party they are overwhelmingly and passionately opposed to the other great populist offer of today's politics (one embraced by Corbyn and by the Tories alike), Brexit. As greater and greater proportions of our population become degree-educated (the best predictor for supporting Remain) the divide between returning non-voters and newly engaged young voters will become ever starker.

A long-mythologised but often dismissed army turned up and joined in battle at the last election. Young people voting for the first time and older people returning to the ballot box after a two-decade absence; they delivered a fundamental shock and turned many of our long-accepted laws of our politics on their head. It is non-voters who have driven politics to populism on the left and the right. And it is populism that has made fools of so many of our pundits. But just as so many pollsters and experts were wrong to dismiss the rise of non-voters and of the politics that they demanded, we would be wrong now to see those demands as fixed in aspic. The 'great black horn' may call these legions to vote and participate for the foreseeable future, but on whose side they will fight is not yet set in stone. We need to take the time to listen properly, understand, and respond to the hopes, aspirations, and concerns of voters, new voters, and non-voters to renew our democracy.

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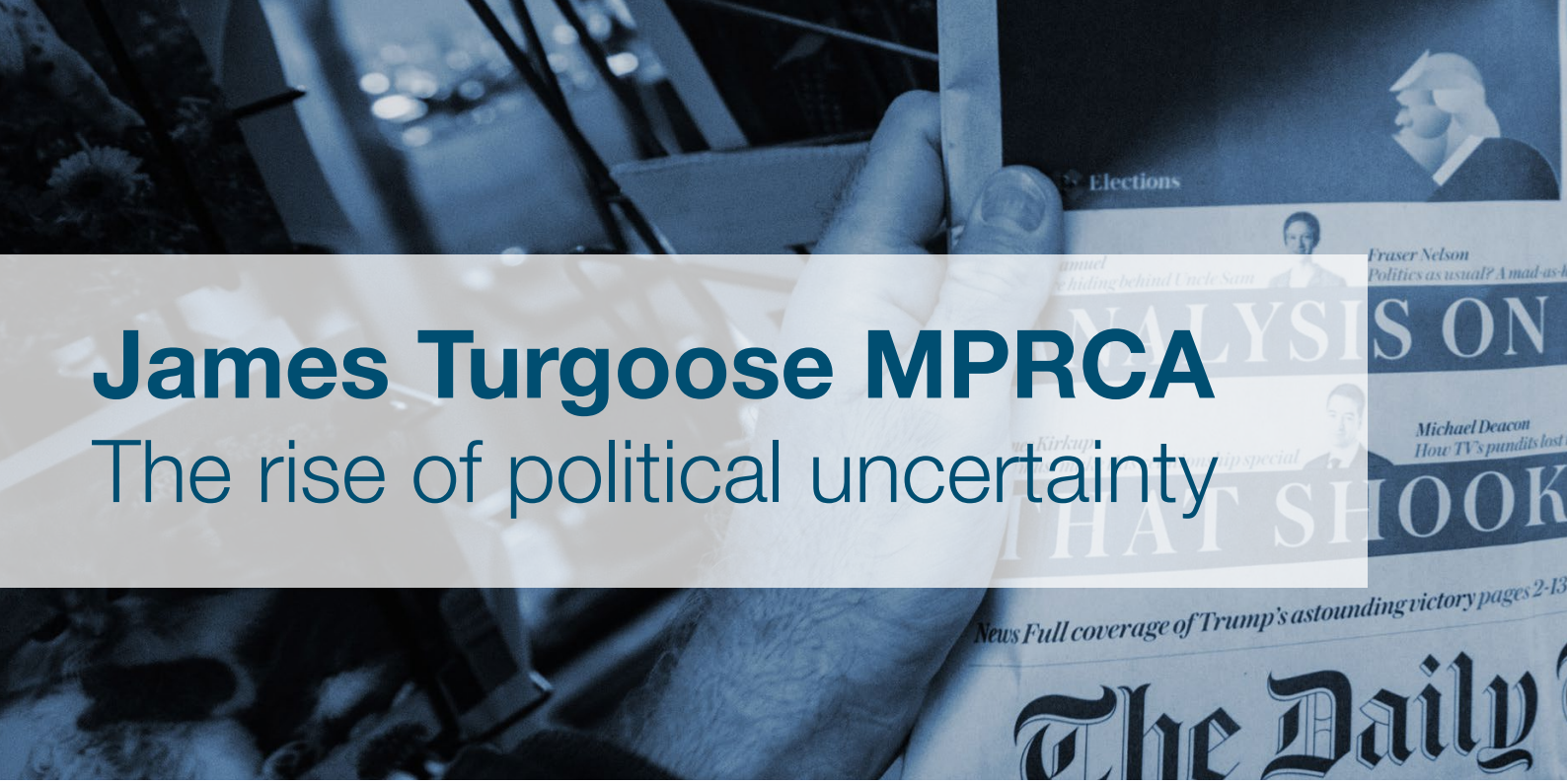

James Turgoose MPRCA

The rise of political uncertainty

Does it matter that political experts have become, well, less expert? As Michael Gove (in)famously said during the Brexit referendum: 'people in this country have had enough of experts'. Well, it's one thing for the general public to have lost faith in experts but what about those businesses, charities, and other organisations who employ public affairs agencies to be their experts in all matters related to politics, policy, and regulations?

Numerous examples have appeared across the UK and the USA in recent months, especially since the election of President Trump, that appear to confirm that for the first time in decades political risk and uncertainty is a real issue for businesses. Many leading FTSE 100 chairmen have confirmed that 'geo-political risk and uncertainty' is on the agenda of boardrooms week in and week out.

In the UK this was first exemplified by Brexit – with its myriad of implications across a range of regulatory issues attached to it – but the recent General Election and hung parliament have only underlined the degree to which we live in uncertain times. The election of President Trump has magnified Brexit onto the global stage – with some even questioning if the Western liberal system of rules and global trade will survive the next decade.

In a recent report by Global Counsel, which was covered in the Financial Times, the level of uncertainty around a whole host of UK public policy issues – from expansion at Heathrow, data protection regulations, the apprenticeship levy, national living wage, etc.– is unprecedented. Can anyone predict what is going to happen or who will be sitting around the Cabinet table in six months' time making policy decisions?

In such a fluid and fast-moving political environment, it seems to me that public affairs agencies should give up trying to make accurate short to medium term predictions – but if we do, what should our role be for our clients?

What are we for? And haven't we been here before?

For me, there are many similarities with how the public affairs world has adapted in recent years to the rise of social media and before that the internet.

Two decades ago a key role of the public affairs agency would be to provide information and, where necessary, access to politicians. I'm told, by a dear former colleague, that political monitoring used to include photocopying relevant excerpts of Hansard and faxing them to the client! Unimaginable today where Hansard is updated online within hours and just one example of how agencies have adapted over time to where they can add the most value.

The emergence of Twitter (it took rather a long time for politicians to appreciate the enormous benefits of being able to communicate directly with voters) posed another significant problem to the traditional role of the public affairs agency. Now anyone, including clients, can engage with politicians directly and track his or her position on a wide range of issues. If need be, they can also contact them directly – the role of 'gatekeeper' that used to be the preserve of the public affairs agency has disappeared. Twitter broke down the gates to the Palace and rightly so.

Of at least equal importance was how the explosion in online outlets and political content helped to create a new environment where policy issues could be raised and put on the agenda at staggering speed. New campaign organisations can appear overnight and a key role of the public affairs agency today is to provide the advice and tools necessary for companies to effectively prepare and engage with such organisations as soon as possible.

These examples demonstrate that public affairs agencies have proven themselves to be adaptable before and will do so again.

The unpredictability of politics in recent years has created two key opportunities for public affairs agencies to seize upon.

1.

The importance of challenging convention. The great Obama strategist David Axelrod (who had rather less

success advising Ed Miliband) famously said 'the thing about conventional wisdoms is that they are almost always wrong'. The inability of most political pundits to predict Brexit, Trump, or the rise of Corbyn would seem to confirm this. So going forward the successful public affairs agencies will be the ones who challenge effectively. This might include tough conversations with clients about what they are seeking to achieve. Or it might include a hard-hitting examination of whether your agency has the right connections and knowledge to deliver.

2.

Move the debate around public affairs expertise and engagement from being a 'nice to have' to 'essential'. In 2015, a survey carried out by Watson Helsby suggested that nearly half of FTSE 100 firms didn't have a senior public affairs director – an indication presumably that boardrooms did not deem the political and regulatory environment of sufficient concern to merit it. It would be interesting to run that survey again today. The unpredictability of politics means that many businesses are already reviewing their risk registers – part of this should be to ensure that their public affairs function is as good as it could be. The likelihood, of course, is that large parts of many businesses have always been affected by Government policy, but only recently has this been understood and appreciated in the boardroom.

So in conclusion, bear in mind the following:

- Translate information into valuable and practical advice. In essence, we all know there is an unprecedented amount of information available to everyone and anyone. But information isn't the same as knowledge. Understand the political landscape and how it impacts upon the regulatory environment that your clients operate in.
- Speak the language of business. Commercialise your advice and become a business adviser to your client, providing them with counsel on policy issues that will specifically affect them.
- Plan for a range of outcomes. This might seem obvious but in a world where the unexpected is likely to happen, have a plan for all political scenarios.
- Challenge conventional ways of operating. Including how your agency has delivered advice and support in the past.
- Business needs us. For the first time in a generation, businesses are worried about the political landscape. The uncertainty of recent years has created a compelling commercial reason for business to buy the best advice around. Seize the opportunity.

James Turgoose MPRCA is Managing Director of JBP.

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