Divided by Values: Jeremy Corbyn, the Labour Party and England's 'North-South Divide'

La Division par les valeurs: Jeremy Corbyn, le Parti travailliste et le fossé Nord-Sud

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Introduction

1   Brexit has bifurcated English culture and identity. Two nations exist. One more cosmopolitan, the other more conservative. Whilst it is not true that all cosmopolitans live in the South nor that all conservatives dwell in the North, the terms 'North' and 'South' can be used as metaphors for these conflicting cultures. The idea of the *North-South divide* is established in the English mind. It is better understood in sociocultural terms rather than as a rigid geographical entity. The historian, Helen M. Jewell, argues in her study *The North-south Divide: The Origins of Northern Consciousness in England* that:

> The divide is well rooted in history, it has in certain times and circumstances undoubted reality, and it should be relished as an aspect of that individualism and eccentricity which the English used to be proud to stand up for in themselves and to tolerate in others, and which they stand at risk of losing if they choose to conform to standardisations and stereotyping imposed to suit bureaucracy[1].

2   But the first problem in the *North-South divide* is where to draw the line. One generally accepted demarcation runs from the Bristol Channel to the Wash. Adapting this model, Danny Dorling and colleagues at the Social and Spatial Inequalities Group at the University of Sheffield considered social and educational data and drew their dividing line from the Bristol Channel to south of the River Humber in Lincolnshire.

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Another line runs from the Bristol Channel to the mouth of the River Trent as it flows into the Humber Estuary. These projections of the

North-South divide

exhibit an interesting cartography. Here the Marches, the West Midlands and part of the East Midlands (usually Nottingham) are Northern. The remainder of the East Midlands (usually Leicester) and East Anglia are southern. For any English native, in cultural as well as geographical terms, this is an unusual discrimination.

3   Leaving lines of demarcation aside, the traditional understanding of a *North-South divide* contained elements of truth amid a raft of inaccuracies. The harshness of life and work, since the industrial revolution, in towns and cities of the North is one such correct point. But fallacious ones coexist, perhaps chief of which was the blindness to the Northern English countryside replete with stunning natural beauty of dale, moor, fell, wold, vale and coastline. Of great houses, aristocratic estates and countless family farms and fishing vessels. It was, and is not, all 'grim up North'. Secondly, in political studies, the

North-South divide

came to be understood as a Labour-dominated North and a Conservative South. This delineation counted the political communities either side of the divide. Due to history and social class, these urban centres, and 'the North' itself, had been seen as Labour England. One could make an argument that this view remains broadly sound. However, the following coda needs to be applied; the Conservative Party has long had a strong presence in the rural North. For example, in the East Riding of Yorkshire the three parliamentary constituencies of Kingston-Upon-Hull are resolutely Labour whilst the remaining constituencies in the county, Beverley and Holderness, Haltemprice and Howden, and East Yorkshire are true blue seats.

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Thirdly is the conceptual cultural error, which occludes Northern contributions to English literature. The North of England birthed great poets (Andrew Marvell, William Wordsworth, Lewis Carroll, W.H. Auden, Ted Hughes and shaped Philip Larkin), novelists and playwrights (Emily Bronte, J.B. Priestley, John Braine and Alan Bennett).

Our approach is to use the Labour Party under Jeremy Corbyn as a barometer of values. Labour traditionally has had heartlands in the North of England, parts of the Midlands and in London. However, as we go on to discuss, recent elections have shown Labour losing support in some of its traditional areas and gaining support where it was previously limited. The article uses a range of data including by-election, local and general election results and statistics from the 2016 referendum on the United Kingdom's continued membership of the European Union. What this article does not address is the

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North-South divide

in Great Britain. Therefore Scotland and Wales are excluded. We acknowledge that our findings are tentative as a more definitive examination of the

North-South divide

in England would require a large quantitative and qualitative study. Nonetheless, a case study of the Labour Party under Corbyn across England is valuable as it reveals the changing sociocultural differences of the largest nation of the United Kingdom.

England – A Nation Divided by Values

England is a nation that has experienced, and continues to experience, sharp divisions between citizens. Historically the divisions have been those of class. Speaking of class in the aftermath of the Great War, Alan J.P. Taylor asserts:

> Since creeds had ceased to divide, class stood out the more sharply. England had always been class conscious, perhaps more than most European communities. English was the only language where accent was determined more by class than by region.
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Nearly a century on class still matters, but there is a large academic literature on how, since the early 1970s, British politics has undergone a process of partisan class dealignment. David Denver makes this point:

> Large sections of the electorate could stop identifying with one party and start to identify with another; some social group as a whole might switch its party allegiance...What largely explains the electoral turmoil of recent years, however, is a sort of half-way house between alignment and realignment, namely dealignment. This refers to a weakening of previously existing alignments.
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In contemporary British politics, and particularly in England, it is sociocultural values that increasingly determine political dividing lines. By sociocultural values we mean ethics, behaviour and customs. In one sense, given globalisation, religious pluralism and mass immigration sociocultural divisions are to be expected in a large, heterogeneous, capitalist society. Why the case of England is interesting lies with the nature of the sociocultural divide and the pace of change since the 1960s and 1970s. The ideas and values of a variety of pressure groups, interest groups and influential individuals have played significant parts in affecting and reforming English culture. Nonetheless, it is the Labour Party that has been the primary agent of sociocultural change. This is because when in government, and occasionally in Opposition, it has utilised its position as the preeminent progressive party of Britain to form legislation and whip its MPs to ensure the passage of bills through both Houses of Parliament. Successful bills become Acts of Parliament from which statute law contributes to shaping English culture.

This is the reason for the article's focus on the Labour Party. Furthermore, to understand contemporary England's *North-South divide*, a sensible place to begin is the Labour Party under Jeremy Corbyn.

In the aftermath of the Great War, Christian observance waned and certainly by the beginnings of the post-war era, one could speak of Britain (not the United Kingdom given the case of Northern Ireland) as a secular country. In place of the foundationalism of Christianity – to inform Labour's culture and social ethics – first liberalism and later Cultural Marxism

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expanded to fill the vacuum. The Labour Party, and its socially progressive MPs, challenged the prevailing sociocultural orthodoxy. For the first sixty years of its life, the Labour Party was a culturally conservative organisation. The emergence of the widely discussed concept of the Permissive Society corresponded with Roy Jenkins' tenure as Home Secretary (1965-1967). Jenkins entitles this chapter of his memoirs, 'The Liberal Hour'.

This period of the Labour government is perhaps the chief example of the step-change from conservatism to liberalism. This step-change was transformative for the Labour Party and for British society. Jenkins was not its inspiration nor its sole actor, but he was unquestionably an essential player, as the holder of one of the four great offices of State. Jenkins' power was to permit parliamentary time and give encouragement to socially progressive Members of Parliament such as Sydney Silverman, Leo Abse and David Steel to introduce Private Members' Bills. Liberal reforms which gave the individual greater rights vis-à-vis the abolition of the death penalty, homosexual relations between men, and abortion can in hindsight be seen as a period of cultural transition from a loosely Christian ethic to a liberal then a Cultural Marxist worldview. Liberalism was the steppingstone from the modern to post-modern era where absolute truth is an oxymoron; where one is 'liberated' from the 'oppression' of traditional culture; and where society is shaped by equality understood as sameness of thought. If this seems a little far-fetched one needs only survey the worldview of the 1945 Labour government which to this day is 'high and lifted up' by most Labour members. Whilst Clement Attlee's cabinet was largely irreligious, its social ethics and culture were essentially Christian. This is evidenced by its attitude towards marriage, family, sex, abortion, crime and punishment and patriotism. By the 1970s, the level of authentic Christianity and Christian socialism within the Labour Party was negligible. The modern had given way to the post-modern era. Post-modern intellectuals, largely French in origin, were captivating much of the Left especially in the universities. When Labour was finally returned to power, its agenda focused less on the fundamental questions of British macroeconomics and more on sociocultural issues. Here the primacy of the politics of identity emerged. Cultural Marxism had left its imprimatur on the Labour Party.

The most significant political rupture in a generation, grounded as much in a divide over sociocultural values as it was about anything else, was the Brexit vote. As Clarke, Goodwin and Whiteley argue:

> ...despite being confronted with an avalanche of advice from national and international figures to vote to remain, and apocalyptic warnings about the consequences that would follow Brexit, a majority voted to leave the EU.

11   The referendum on the United Kingdom's continued membership of the European Union on 23rd June 2016 exposed England as a nation divided on questions of sociocultural values. Of the 31.5 million or, put another way, the 72.2% of eligible voters, those who were richer and better educated generally voted Remain. Citizens who were more socially progressive and who live in metropolitan areas were overwhelmingly supportive of the United Kingdom's continued membership of the European Union. Less wealthy and more modestly educated citizens, those living in provincial England and who hold more traditional values, were natural Leave voters. Those citizens deeply wedded to nation (the idea of England) and to nation-state (the United Kingdom), be they from a Conservative or Labourist tradition, tend to dislike the project of European federalism. Labour's former industrial heartlands in the North of England marched to a similar tune as much of the Conservative lowlands of the South of England. Whilst progressives of all parties (Labour, Liberal Democrats, Greens and Conservative) see a virtuous partnership between the European Union with its internationalism and rights-based liberalism as a bulwark against 'Little Englanders'. Whether one is sanguine or sceptical about the strength of the UK, patriotism, sovereignty, nationalism and the traditions of English liberty – consciously or unconsciously – it marks one either a 'Leaver' or a 'Remainer'.

The Emergence of Jeremy Corbyn as Leader of the Labour Party

Since 1980, the Labour Party has struggled to find a suitable electoral system for choosing its leaders. Prior to that, leaders were elected solely by the Members of Parliament with the runner up becoming the Deputy Leader. This system elected Clement Attlee in 1935, Hugh Gaitskell in 1955, Harold Wilson in 1963, James Callaghan in 1976 and Michael Foot in 1980. There was by that stage growing pressure for internal party reform, orchestrated mainly by the radical left of the party, to allow members a greater say. Hence in the early 1980s, the 'electoral college' was established in which MPs were reduced to having 30 per cent of the vote, constituencies the same and the largest share for trade unions. Under this system, Neil Kinnock was elected in 1983 and John Smith in 1992. The presence of block voting by the trade unions was seen as a further embarrassment and a system of 'one member one vote' was introduced by Smith and under which Tony Blair was elected Leader in 1994. Gordon Brown was unopposed in 2007 when the left-wing challengers Michael Meacher and John McDonnell failed to secure sufficient nominations from their parliamentary colleagues. Hence, the system that Smith had introduced was used to elect Brown's successor. However, this system too proved embarrassing for the party when it emerged that several members had a plurality of votes if they were also members of trade unions or other affiliated socialist societies. The result was that Ed Miliband defeated his elder brother on the votes of affiliates despite David Miliband coming first among MPs and party members. In response, the rules were again changed under Ed Miliband's leadership to avoid the situation where one person had multiple votes. However, in an attempt to encourage wider public involvement in the party and to placate the trade unions, a new system was introduced which would include members, affiliated supporters (i.e. trade unions and other affiliated society members) and registered supporters, who in return for paying £3 could vote for the next Leader.

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The problems with this system are widely documented in the various biographies of Jeremy Corbyn

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and need not detain us here. The measures were passed with little opposition at the time by the party conference and some on the right of the party actually supported the measures because they believed it would dilute the influence of the members who would be to the left of supporters who in turn were closer to the floating voter. This cautious attitude towards the members by the party's establishment during the New Labour years is a crucial factor in explaining the triumph of Corbyn's campaign in 2015, something which members of that establishment failed to recognise during the campaign when their television appearances bolstered Corbyn.

In the run up to the 2016 leadership challenge, the National Executive Committee decided to revisit the rules for conducting the ballot resulting in a much higher fee for registered supporters of £25.

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This was designed to discourage many of those who had paid the £3 fee in 2015 from voting in 2016. In fact, there appears to have been only a limited impact of this change with 183,000 people applying to be registered supporters and 50,000 of those being rejected.

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Registered supporters grew substantially in number before the cut-off date for the 2016 contest.

The results of both the leadership contests in which Corbyn has stood are emphatic. He won in all three sections of the ballot in both contests as shown in Tables 1 and 2 below. His lead among the registered supporters was highest, but he also has clear support among the affiliated supporters and the membership. In the latter category there is some polling evidence to suggest that his support is actually much stronger among those who joined the party since the 2015 General Election defeat.

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Not all of those joined in order to support Corbyn but it is clear that the majority did. Equally, there has been a falling away of members since Corbyn's election among those who do not support him.

16   Table 1: Labour Party Leadership Contest 2015 Results

	Members (%)	Affiliated supporters (%)	Registered Supporters (%)
Jeremy Corbyn	49.6	57.6	83.8
Andy Burnham	22.7	26.0	5.8
Yvette Cooper	22.2	12.6	8.0
Liz Kendall	5.5	3.7	2.4

17   Source: BBC News (2015)

18   Table 2: Labour Party Leadership Contest 2016 Results

	Members (%)	Affiliated supporters (%)	Registered supporters (%)
Jeremy Corbyn	59	60.2	69.9
Owen Smith	41	39.8	30.1

19   Source: Sparrow (2016a)

In short, his support within the party is very strong outside of Parliament. Trends in membership show that his dominance of the party is becoming more emphatic. There has been a major shift in the control of the party towards the left.

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From the most unlikely of starting points, Corbyn now has overwhelming support from Labour members and supporters as demonstrated in the two leadership contests within which he has stood and the fact that Labour gained thirty parliamentary seats and a 40% vote share in the 2017 general election. However, polling data has repeatedly shown that the Labour Party under his leadership has failed to dominate British politics.

Labour's electoral strategy and the *'North-South divide'*

Following Labour's surprising General Election defeat in 1992, party analysts have argued that the only way for their party to secure an electoral majority is to appeal to voters in the South of England. Population movements mean that more people are living in the South-East. Labour's traditional heartlands in the North of England have seen depopulation, to an extent that means that there are not enough seats in those areas to win a parliamentary majority, even when adding seats from Scotland and Wales. This was stressed most famously in the Southern Discomfort pamphlet of Giles Radice.

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The southern voter was generally more affluent and therefore tended to be more right-wing on economic and social issues according to the Southern Discomfort thesis. Labour had to embrace their concerns in order to win General Elections in the future.

The triumph of New Labour at the polls in 1997 and 2001 appeared to justify this argument. Following Labour's return to the Opposition benches in 2010, Radice made the same arguments alongside Blair's former senior policy advisor, Patrick Diamond.

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Thus emerged the idea that the party must maintain its position on the centre ground of British politics against attempts by the new Leader and those close to him to adopt more radical positions on issues such as austerity. Ed Miliband's defeat in 2015 justified, so the moderates argued, their thesis that for the party to win it must occupy the centre ground.

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This position was articulated most clearly by Liz Kendall in the 2015 leadership contest.

An alternative analysis to the model presented by Radice and Diamond is that of the 'missing five million' by Paul Hunter of the Smith Institute.

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He argued that the issue was not one of appealing primarily to southern voters. Far more votes had been lost in the Midlands and in suburbs across Britain. Rather than target certain voters, therefore, what this meant was that Labour had to offer a more ideological appeal. His thesis became part of the call for a return to a more egalitarian social democracy advocated by those who were closer to Ed Miliband's politics.

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Rather than seeing the 2015 General Election defeat as proof of the centre-ground hypothesis, the left has argued that what is needed is a much clearer delineation between the two major parties. What was offered in 2015 was seen as 'austerity-lite'; faced with limited choice, the voters decided to accept the status quo or to vote for a more radical alternative where they could. So Labour lost support in England to a combination of the United Kingdom Independence Party, the Green Party and abstentions.

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Corbyn's electoral strategy therefore sought to regain support from these disparate elements. This meant that the Labour Party should not seek to accommodate ideological ground set by the Tories but rather set out a radical alternative capable of positioning Labour to the left of the Liberal Democrats and the Greens, regaining the support of those who felt alienated from mainstream politics and voted UKIP and enthusing those, particularly the young, who had effectively dropped out of mainstream party politics. What is now required is an examination of Labour's electoral performance since September 2015.

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Labour's Electoral Performance under Corbyn

In the period since Corbyn's election as Leader there have been numerous elections, the EU referendum and consistent opinion poll data with which to test out the early signs of Corbyn's electoral strategy. These results must only be tentative but, we argue, offer sufficient evidence to question his electoral strategy as the cultural gap has widened.

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By-elections

There were ten by-elections between the 2015 and 2017 General Elections all occurring since Corbyn's election as Leader of the Labour Party. By-elections are notoriously difficult to extrapolate a sense of the wider electoral picture. On the one hand, they are local but they also allow voters to express opinions about national politics. The extent to which they can be deemed to show wider national trends is, however, questionable. Liberal/Liberal Democrat by-election victories have often not translated into success at the subsequent General Election. As with local elections, voters often cast their vote as a reflection on the state of national politics. Protest voting at local elections about national political issues explains why by-election results frequently do not translate into success at the subsequent General Election.

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Of the contested by-elections only two have resulted in a change in incumbency. The first was at Richmond Park by-election held on 1

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December 2016 caused by the resignation of Conservative MP, Zac Goldsmith over the Conservative government's decision to allow for an additional runway at Heathrow Airport. Goldsmith stood as an Independent and was not challenged by his old party, nor by UKIP. He lost to the Liberal Democrats, in a contest that became more focussed on Brexit in an area which recorded a strong level of support for Remain in the 2016 referendum. Labour came a long way third with a fall in its vote share of 8.67 per cent and obtained fewer votes than it had members, although this may have had more to do with the election being seen as a direct contest between Goldsmith and the Liberal Democrats.

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The second was in Copeland (Cumbria) following the resignation of Labour MP Jamie Reed. This resulted in a Conservative gain. Both of these by-elections say something about the North-South divide in British politics. Richmond is a predominantly affluent urban area on the edge of cosmopolitan London. In contrast, Copeland was a relatively poorer area which was previously the seat of Whitehaven. Here more socially conservative views abound, and it was estimated that 60 per cent of Labour voters supported leaving the European Union. [21]

29   The first by-election was in Oldham West and Royton on 3rd December 2015 following the death of Michael Meacher MP. The selection was won by the local council leader, Jim McMahon who saw off a challenge from candidates more sympathetic to Corbyn and the Leader rarely featured in the campaign. McMahon won with an increased vote share of 7.3 per cent. [22]

30   Two by-elections were held on 5th May 2016. One in Sheffield Brightside and Hillsborough following the death of incumbent Harry Harpham, where his widow won the contest for Labour with an increased vote share of 5.9 per cent. The other was in the Welsh constituency of Ogmore following the resignation of Huw Irranca-Davies and was retained by Labour, with a narrow fall in its share of the vote by 0.3 per cent. [23]

31   On 16th June, there was a further by-election in Tooting, following the successful London Mayoral campaign of Sadiq Khan. This seat had been a strong Labour one but the majority had fallen to just 2,842 in the 2015 General Election, albeit still securing 47.2 per cent of the vote. Labour won the by-election with an increased vote share of 8.7 per cent. [24]

32   On 20th October 2016, there were two further by-elections. The first of these in Batley and Spen had been caused by the tragic murder of Jo Cox MP and the other major parties declined to put up a candidate against Labour in this seat, resulting in a vote share of 85.8 per cent, with the rest of the vote split between various far right candidates and independents. The other contest that day was in Whitney following the resignation of former Prime Minister David Cameron as a Member of Parliament and witnessed a dramatic fall in the Conservative majority from 25,155 to 5,702 with the main beneficiary being the Liberal Democrats and Labour's vote falling by 2.2 per cent albeit in a seat where Labour has little support. [25]

33   The final contest in Sleaford and North Hykeham on 8th December came following the resignation of Conservative MP, Stephen Phillips following a disagreement with his party over Brexit. The seat is safely Conservative. The main focus was therefore on who would come second. Labour had secured second place in the 2015 General Election but slipped into fourth place with a fall in vote share of 7.1 per cent and being overtaken by both UKIP and the Liberal Democrats (Mason and Weaver, 2016).

The final by-elections before the 2017 General Election were caused by two Labour resignations. Copeland was discussed above and the other by-election was in Stoke on Trent Central, where prominent Labour progressive, Tristram Hunt resigned. This seat had recorded a large leave vote in the referendum and was tipped to be a good UKIP target constituency, as seen by the fact that its then Leader Paul Nuttall stood. However, UKIP's position nationally as well as doubts over Nuttall as a candidate ensured that Labour held the seat.

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Since the 2017 General Election there have, at the time of writing, been two by-elections. While one (West Tyrone) took place in the different political setting of Northern Ireland, the other reveals more about the cultural gap we have been discussing. In Lewisham East, Labour's Heidi Alexander resigned in order to become Deputy Mayor of London. Although Labour held the seat, its vote share was cut by 17.7% by the Liberal Democrats who campaigned against Corbyn's indecisiveness over Brexit. Vince Cable, Liberal Democrat Leader saying that 'it cannot take pro-European voters for granted.'

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Recognising that Labour would be damaged in the North by pledging a second referendum, but hemmed in by a largely pro-European activist base, Corbyn has lost support support in both Southern Remain areas and Northern Leave areas.

Local Elections

36   On 5th

May 2016, local elections were held in England. Of the 353 councils in England there were elections in 124. On the projected national vote Labour topped the poll with 31 per cent of the vote, 30 per cent for the Conservatives and 15 per cent and 12 per cent respectively for the Liberal Democrats and UKIP (Prosser, 2020). Corbyn claimed victory on this basis but the results were held as disappointing for Labour overall. The Conservative Party was at this time divided over the EU referendum and its support in opinion polls had declined. Labour had a net loss of vote share (from 42.9 per cent to 38.6 per cent) and council seats (from 1,344 to 1,326) although it remained the largest party in local politics (BBC News, 2016). At the end of the counting Labour held the same number of councils as previously.

There were some notable successes, particularly in terms of elected mayors. As already mentioned, Sadiq Khan won the contest for London Mayor but he was noticeably hostile towards Corbyn who, he felt, was on a different wing of the party from himself and was an electoral liability (Khan, 2016). Following the election of Labour's candidate, Marvin Rees in Bristol, Corbyn attended his victory celebrations rather than Khan's. These two victories were the most notable Labour successes in the spring elections.

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In terms of the elections for Police and Crime Commissioners Labour did have some successes taking Cheshire, Gwent, Humberside and Leicestershire while also losing Bedfordshire.

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Some had predicted that Labour may do badly in the first national contest which Corbyn faced as Leader. The results were therefore better for Labour than these predictions, but equally there was no significant breakthrough to show that Corbyn's electoral strategy was working. Labour's biggest successes were the mayoral elections in London (with an anti-Corbyn candidate) and Bristol.

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The 2017 local elections were held on 5th May and were deemed to be a key indicator of how the parties were faring nationally ahead of the General Election. In England, the results showed clear gains for the Conservatives gaining 319 councillors and Labour losing 142. Whereas the Tories gained control of 10 councils, Labour lost one. Several of these Conservative gains were in the South of England but not all, notably Derbyshire which witnessed 19 seats changing hands direct from Labour to the Conservatives in one of the most notable results nationally. In Lancashire, Labour lost 10 and the Conservatives gained 11 to take control of the council. Labour made further losses in Scotland and in Wales which means that they performed badly across Great Britain. There were also a number of newly elected mayors with Labour taking Merseyside and Greater Manchester as widely expected but losing West Midlands, and even more strikingly in terms of the

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North-South divide Tees Valley in the North-East of England.

In the 2018 local elections Labour and the Conservatives both had a projected national vote share of 35%. Labour also gained 79 seats, while the Conservatives lost 35. However, within this national picture there was considerable variation, which again shows the

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North-South divide

in action. In London, Labour gained 67 seats, but outside of the capital they secured just 12 seats compared to the Conservatives' 57. Labour lost control of two councils where there is a large working-class vote including Derby, and Nuneaton and Bedworth. Both of these areas recorded significant Leave votes in the referendum.

EU Referendum

The official position of the Labour Party towards the EU referendum was to campaign to 'Remain' and local parties received a very strong steer in this direction as well as the overwhelming majority of MPs supporting continued membership. Prior to becoming Leader, Corbyn had expressed Eurosceptic sentiments, but he accepted the party position on this issue and campaigned – albeit, some thought, half-heartedly – in favour of 'Remain'. It was his somewhat lacklustre performance as Leader during the referendum campaign which finally precipitated the leadership challenge.

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However, the results showed that a large proportion of Labour voters did not accept the party position on the issue of EU membership). In total, 37 per cent of Labour voters supported Britain leaving the EU, roughly the same proportion as SNP voters (36 per cent) which had also campaigned strongly to Remain. .

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UKIP voters were predictably the strongest Leave backers (96 per cent) while the Greens were the most pro-European with 75 per cent voting to Remain. All electoral regions of the UK recorded a Leave vote with the exceptions of Scotland (62 per cent remain), London (59.9 per cent) and Northern Ireland (55.8 per cent). Given that votes were counted at local authority level and then added together to get regional totals, it is somewhat problematic calculating the referendum results by constituency but there are several Labour constituencies which recorded strong Leave votes including Bolsover (70.8 per cent), Hartlepool (69.6 per cent), Stoke on Trent (69.4 per cent) and Doncaster (69 per cent) which were among the 16 areas to vote Leave by 69 per cent or more. Many of these constituencies were in the North and Midlands of England which had seen economic decline and widespread poverty. Labour-held constituencies with large Remain votes tended to be in London, which tended to be more cosmopolitan and had larger proportions of younger people.

Turning to the social grade classification system, the majority of AB voters voted remain (57 per cent), but the majority among C1 voters was for leave (51 per cent) and that vote was even higher in the D and E categories (64 per cent in both classes).

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On the issue of Brexit, it would seem that Corbyn's position is closer to those of voters overall than were those of his leadership rival in 2016, Owen Smith, who adopted a strongly pro-EU stance. Corbyn clearly lacked room for manoeuvre on this issue, not only because of the strength of EU support in his own party but also the fact that one of Corbyn's key support bases, the young, were the demographic with the largest support for Remain (73 per cent of 18-24 year olds).

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2017 General Election

There was no clear victor in the 2017 UK general election. The Conservative Party were the largest party with 318 seats but no overall majority. They secured 42.4 per cent of the vote share and 13.66 million votes. This was a disaster for Prime Minister Theresa May who had called a snap election because the Conservative Party had a massive lead in the opinion polls over the Labour Party under Corbyn. Moreover, May's confidence was high going into the campaign with her personal ratings much higher than Corbyn's. May performed very poorly in the campaign and Corbyn, with no pressure or expectations, came across as calm, sincere and generally well prepared. Labour won 262 parliamentary seats an increase of 30. They gained 40% of the share of the vote an increase of 9.5 per cent on the 2015 figure. In total, 12.87 million votes were cast for Labour under Corbyn compared with 9.34 million cast for Labour under Miliband in 2015. This was an increase of 3.53 million votes.

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Further evidence of the changing North-South dynamics can be gleaned from further analysis of individual seats. Canterbury, in the south of England, since the creation of the single-member constituency in 1885 has been a Conservative seat but was won by Labour for the first time in 2017 by 187 on a swing of 9.3 per cent. Canterbury is a generally wealthy constituency with a large student population. The result was largely due to Corbyn's ability to enthuse younger voters and the increased registration of student voters in the constituency.

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In contrast, Stoke on Trent South is a much poorer constituency which has been held by Labour since its creation in 1950. Since the decline of its traditional industries, such as pottery and coal, Stoke on Trent has been a city with comparatively high rates of unemployment. As a city it recorded a high Leave vote of 69% compared to 30.6% for Remain in the 2016 referendum on a turnout of 65.7%.

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If voting was still primarily conducted on economic lines then the results of these two seats would have been reversed and would have continued to follow their historic pattern. The fact that they did not shows the changing cultural politics. Predominantly working-class Stoke South became Conservative having recorded a large Leave vote whereas the much more middle-class Canterbury went Labour. There is a clear cultural, educational and generational divide in these two seats with the Conservatives appealing to socially conservative working-class voters and Labour to a more cosmopolitan electorate. Further evidence of this can be found in seats such as Kensington in London which went Labour for the first time having been an overwhelming Remain voting area and some seats which Labour held in the North but which recorded bigger swings to the Conservatives having previously registered larger Leave votes.

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Conclusion

50   We have argued that the *North-South divide*

in England is increasingly one of socio-culture. Economics and the perceived political economy of political parties remains a key factor in how citizens choose to vote but its importance is diminishing. In an era of competing worldviews and a clash of cultures, the fine details of whether the economy should be welfare capitalist or liberal capitalist is lost on most voters. Some will always argue for more state activity and others less intervention in the market. Some will maintain that public services should be provided by the state while others see the benefit of private providers in the allocation of public services. At root, most English citizens value the market economy and the welfare state.

The first decades of the twenty-first century have been characterised in England by social change and economic uncertainty. In this period, the Conservative Party platform has become much more socially liberal with many of its leading politicians holding views indistinguishable to Labour, Liberal Democrat, and Green Party MPs. Under New Labour, the following issues came to the fore of public discussion: equality and diversity, patriarchy, multiculturalism and LGBTQI rights. Through legislation, New Labour altered the social ethics of the country on these issues.

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This has been nothing short of a cultural transformation. A majority of young people – Generation Y or Millennials – born between the early 1980s and the early 2000s have been taught that such values are good; that in terms of social ethics this is the 'new normal'. Some citizens hold a contrary view about the state of England's socio-culture. They are best described as social and cultural conservatives. England has therefore

52 become a nation divided by socio-cultural values which makes The

North-South divide

an insufficient explanation. The divide is between cosmopolitans and conservatives. A significant minority of Labour-inclined voters are conservatives (in a social and cultural sense). They struggle with socially progressive perspectives of the New Labourites or the socialist Corbynistas. The Labour Party under Corbyn is a large political party which contains many younger activists and it struggles to speak, let alone to break spiritual bread, with those of a conservative culture. As the Labour Party under Corbyn exceeds expectations, albeit relatively low expectations, and continues to attract new members it increasingly fails to represent countless thousands of conservative Labourites.

British politics is not broken. However, the English nation is divided by values in a manner that has been unknown in the post-war era. The 1940s and 1950s retained the social separation of class. The 1960s legislative reforms saw Parliament out of step with public opinion and angry student protests over foreign wars. The hallmark of the 1970s was industrial unrest and the fears of governability. The 1980s set people with contrasting economic prescriptions to remedy the British economy against each other. The 1990s continued Thatcherism in a period of globalisation; the new millennium brought England, the United Kingdom and her allies a deadly new enemy. But in its newness and pluralism it gave birth in policy and attitude to old ideas rooted in discredited doctrines. Cultural Marxist assumptions and, chief among its goals, identity politics gradually set the English against one another. Debates about the level of state and market persist as do the proper time and place to cross borders to secure human rights. But in England, disagreement over culture is now more pronounced as the divisions over Brexit have shown. Citizens who may look and sound the same and live similar lives disagree on sociocultural matters (including ethics, behaviour and

53 custom). The future of a united England is something that cannot be taken for granted.

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ABSTRACTS

This article explores the sociocultural divide in England exposed by Brexit. The metaphors of 'North' and 'South' are used to explain this, where the former is seen as more culturally conservative and the latter as more cosmopolitan. We examine the Labour Party under Jeremy Corbyn and show how its values have shifted away from its Northern heartlands. The article uses a range of data including by-elections, local and general election results and statistics from the 2016 referendum on the United Kingdom's continued membership of the European Union.

L'article examine le fossé socio-culturel révélé par le Brexit en Angleterre. Ici, le "Nord" et le "Sud" servent de métaphores pour appréhender ce fossé : le Nord tend à être considéré comme conservateur sur le plan culturel et le Sud plus cosmopolite. En s'appuyant sur un ensemble de données comprenant les résultats des élections partielles, locales et législatives ainsi que des statistiques issues du Référendum de 2016 sur l'appartenance à l'Union européenne, les auteurs mettent en évidence le rôle fondamental joué par le Parti Travailliste de Jeremy Corbyn dont les valeurs se sont éloignées de ses traditionnels bastions électoraux du nord.

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