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The Labour Leadership Election 2016



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The Labour Leadership

How is the leader elected?

In the past, Labour leaders have been elected by an electoral college split in three. Under this system Labour MPs and MEPs, Labour party members, and members of affiliate associations were balloted separately with the results of each bloc making up a third of the vote. In an effort to mitigate the visibility of the trade union vote, this system was replaced last year with a 'One Member One Vote' (OMOV) system in which every member's vote carries an equal weight. The new system, in which MPs and members of the public who sign up as Labour party supporters have equally weighted votes, helped the most left wing candidate Jeremy Corbyn to win the 2015 leadership election due to his high level of support among the left-leaning party membership. The membership was skewed further left by a large influx of new members taking advantage of a lower £3 'supporter' fee, that, while not making them full party members, did grant them a vote in the ballot. The vast majority of these new members were inspired to join the party because of the success of Jeremy Corbyn.

The 2015 leadership election

The previous Labour leader, Ed Miliband, resigned on the back of a humiliating election defeat in May 2015. Confronted by a coalition government riven by division, a Conservative Party at war with itself on Europe, and an imploding Liberal Democrat Party, Labour not only failed to capitalise on the Lib Dem's declining popularity, but suffered an unprecedented defeat in Scotland to the insurgent SNP. Naturally, the nature and scale of the election defeat raised questions about Labour's strategy and messaging. It is in this context that the 2015 election was fought, with most of the candidates pitching to the right in an effort to regain credibility on the economy. However, this shift was emphatically rejected by the Labour membership who voted resoundingly for Jeremy Corbyn, the anti-austerity, left-wing protest candidate.

Results of the 2015 Labour Leadership Election

Candidate	Percentage of the vote
Andy Burnham	19%
Yvette Cooper	17%
Jeremy Corbyn	59.5%
Liz Kendall	4.5%

This year's contest

The OMOV system is still in place for this year's election. Labour's National Executive Council (NEC) attempted to impose a few caveats to counter the insurgent influence of the new members. The NEC proposed a ban on voting for party members who joined before January 2016 unless they purchased a new membership at the higher cost of £25 between Monday 18th and Wednesday 20th July, disenfranchising around 130,000 new members and supporters. This ban was initially overturned by the High Court following a crowdfunding legal challenge from five Labour Party



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members. However, the NEC mounted a successful appeal to this ruling, meaning that new members will not be able to vote.

There has also been controversy over exactly who should be on the ballot. A candidate needs 50 nominations from other MPs and MEPs in order to make it onto the ballot, a number which Jeremy Corbyn would almost certainly fail to reach. The NEC narrowly voted 18-14 in favour of the incumbent leader being automatically included in the contest, and on the 28th of July the High Court upheld this decision following a challenge from a Labour donor. After Angela Eagle received fewer nominations than Owen Smith by the 20th of July she agreed to step aside to unify the anti-Corbyn vote, meaning that the choice presented to the voters in the contest will be between Jeremy Corbyn and Owen Smith. The first of six leadership hustings took place in Cardiff on the 4th of August.

Key dates

Event	Date
2nd husting: Gateshead	Thursday 11 th August
3rd husting: Nottinghamshire	Wednesday 17 th August
4th husting: Birmingham	Thursday 18 th August
Ballot papers distributed	Week commencing 22 nd August
5th husting: Glasgow	Thursday 25 th August
6th and final husting: London	Thursday 1 st September
Ballots to be returned	Wednesday 21 st September
Results announced	Saturday 24 th September

What is at stake?

The election of the new Labour leader is more than just an attempt to overthrow Jeremy Corbyn; it is a battle for control of the Labour party. Corbyn has mobilised an alienated, insurgent membership that stands far to the left of the mainstream Parliamentary Party. This threatens to drag the Labour Party to the left, which, if the polls are to be believed, virtually guarantees a heavy defeat in the 2020 General Election. Corbyn's critics argue that, if the party wishes to have any chance of winning in 2020, they must find a new leader.

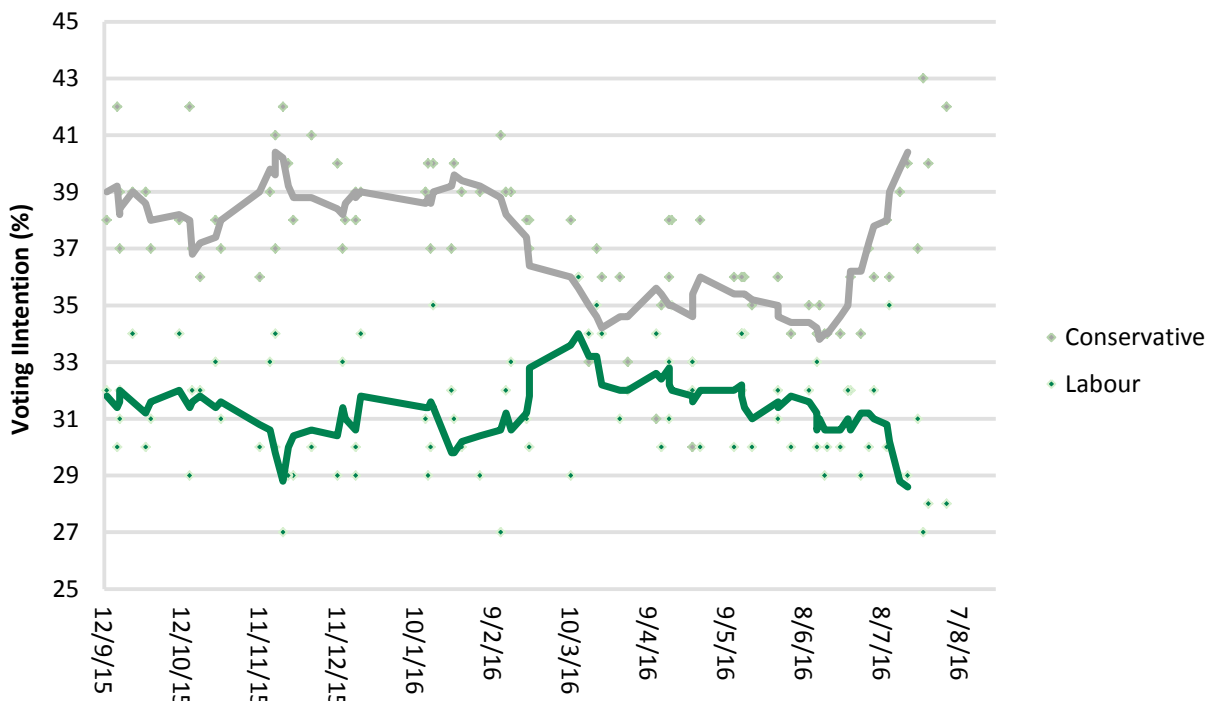


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Who is going to win?

If the current situation does not change dramatically over the next few weeks, the winner of the 2016 Labour leadership contest will almost certainly be Jeremy Corbyn. Despite his collapsing support among the Parliamentary Party and Owen Smith’s leadership of a united Labour establishment against him, the rules of the contest almost guarantee Corbyn victory – his majority of fervent supporters within the membership is almost insurmountable, as evidenced by his huge winning margin in 2015. Owen Smith can only win if he can convince supporters on the left of the membership that he is an electorally viable, radical, left-wing alternative to Corbyn.

National Voting Intention Since Corbyn Became Leader



What will the consequences be?

If Corbyn does win, the consequences for Labour will be profound. The party would be led by an unelectable leader who emphatically lost a vote of no confidence amongst his own MPs and whose frontbench has mostly resigned. Mainstream MPs will be forced to make a choice: keep hacking away at Corbyn with repeated votes of no confidence or break away from Labour and form a new party.

If the majority of the 172 MPs do split from the Labour Party and appoint their own Parliamentary leader they will automatically become the official opposition as the second largest party in the Commons. This will confer on them the benefits and privileges of being the official opposition, such as the right to determine business in Parliament. However questions remain about who would have



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access to Labour's current infrastructure, including membership databases, properties, and funding. In particular, the allocation of short money, a substantial amount of public money available to opposition parties, is currently based on the results of the previous General Election. This would mean that, under current rules, Jeremy Corbyn would continue to receive the total Labour allocation of funding since the new party would not have been in existence at the 2015 General Election.

Clearly, a split in the Labour Party would have electoral consequences, beginning with the local authority and mayoral elections between now and 2020. Polling suggests that the majority of Labour voters would continue to vote for whichever faction maintains control of the official party, but this would still lead to a vastly weakened left wing force in British politics because of the nature of the First Past the Post (FPTP) voting system. However, if Corbyn remains leader and the party does not split, the outlook is not much better, as current polling suggests that Labour would lose significant ground to UKIP in the north and remain woefully uncompetitive in marginal seats.



The Contenders



Rt. Hon. Jeremy Corbyn MP
Labour Party Leader
Constituency: Islington North

“I’d rather be fighting the Tories”

Aims:

Reverse austerity, oppose Trident, invest in public services, introduce ‘People’s Quantitative Easing’ and a ‘National Education Service’, renationalise the railways, introduce rent controls and a maximum wage.

Parliamentary Career

- Leader of the Labour Party since September 2015
- MP since 1983

Outside of Politics

- Weekly columnist for the Morning Star
- Member of the Socialist Campaign Group
- Member of the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament
- Local councillor for the London Borough of Haringey

Where does he stand?

Jeremy Corbyn is the most left wing leader of the Labour party since Michael Foot. His overarching goal is to fight austerity and offer a vision of a fundamentally different British society – one from which the “five evils” of discrimination, inequality, neglect, insecurity and prejudice have been banished. Specific policies include scrapping Trident, establishing a National Education Service, “People’s Quantitative Easing”, and renationalising the railways and energy companies.

Supporters

Though outnumbered, Corbyn is not without supporters in his own Parliamentary party. At the secret ballot for the motion of no confidence on 28th June, a total of 40 Labour MPs voted against the motion. It would have been with these 40 MPs that Corbyn would presumably have begun his search for the 50 nominations necessary to get on the ballot had the NEC not guaranteed his place and the High Court not upheld the decision.

¹ Photo Credit: [Garry Knight – Jeremy Corbyn](#)



The Contenders

Nonetheless Corbyn's powerbase lies outside of the Parliamentary Labour Party. He has the unequivocal support of the key unions and has nominations from 120 of the 144 of the CLPs that have nominated a candidate so far, but most crucially he has a zealous, large base of followers within the party membership. Hundreds of thousands of people have signed up to be members of the party since Corbyn began his leadership campaign in 2015, with each of them receiving the same amount of power as an MP for the purpose of leadership elections.

Prospects

Given his huge winning margin in 2015, in order to win the contest Corbyn needs only to retain most his core support from the unions, the CLPs and the membership. A poll commissioned by *The Times* published in July, before Owen Smith's nomination, showed Corbyn's approval rating amongst the membership slipping to net +3, down from +45 the previous month. However, since Smith's nomination, Jeremy Corbyn performs very well in head-to-head polling suggesting that, while there is dissatisfaction about his leadership, Owen Smith is not perceived as a viable alternative.

It is likely that Corbyn will fight a defensive campaign, presenting Smith as an aggressor who disregards the unprecedented mandate given to Corbyn by the membership. Given the fervency of the hard core of Corbyn's support and the sheer size of his 2015 majority, it should not be difficult for Corbyn to win this contest.



The Contenders



Owen Smith MP

Constituency: Pontypridd

“Our job is to level the playing field for individuals and whole communities.”

Aims:

“Smash the Tories”, bring back the 50p top tax rate, create a new wealth tax for the top 1%, renationalise railways, divide the Department of Work and Pensions into a Ministry for Labour and Department for Social Security

Parliamentary Career:

- Shadow Secretary of State for Work and Pensions: September 2015 – June 2016
- Shadow Secretary of State for Wales: May 2012 – September 2015
- Shadow Minister (Wales): October 2010 – October 2011

Outside of Politics:

- Lobbyist for pharmaceutical company Pfizer, BBC producer

Where does he stand?

Originally seen as a centrist alternative to Corbyn, Smith has now pivoted strongly to the left. Promising to “smash austerity”, Smith has pledged left wing policies such as renationalising railways, making zero-hour contracts unlawful, ending the public sector pay freeze, re-instating the 50p top rate of tax and creating a new “wealth tax” aimed at the top 1% of earners. These pledges are clearly designed to position Owen Smith as an ‘electable radical’, a strategy which is absolutely necessary given the OMOV rules. The only way for Smith to depose Corbyn is to woo the left-leaning membership of the party away from its nearly-unelectable leader. Following a successful election, it is likely that Smith would return to the centre ground.

Supporters

Owen Smith casts himself as the unifying candidate, ironically drawing together the anti-Corbyn vote. Smith can count on the support of the 172 MPs who originally voted against Jeremy Corbyn in the vote of no confidence, but also on any members of the Labour Party who fear that Jeremy Corbyn is leading their party towards electoral oblivion. In theory, this should allow Owen Smith to reach a wide range of supporters across the full spectrum of the party. However, he has not exhibited the charisma necessary to attract new members to the party to vote for him and his relative obscurity has hampered his chances of converting Corbyn supporters within the party. So far



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he has attracted the support of less than thirty constituency Labour parties and just three trade unions.

Prospects

Smith will be relying on two strategies: presenting Corbyn as fundamentally unelectable at General Election and attempting to woo his core support in the Labour membership away from him. The first of these will be fairly easy as, according to nearly every major poll commissioned including of Labour members, Corbyn *is* fundamentally unelectable at General Election.

Nonetheless, Corbyn's unpopularity with MPs and with the general public is not translating into unpopularity with his voter base within the party membership, who do not seem concerned that the Conservative lead over Labour in polls is steadily increasing. This has prompted Smith's second strategy, the pivot to the left in an effort to present himself as an 'electable Corbyn' and steal the support of the membership, the unions and the CLPs. No matter how convincingly Smith can rail against Theresa May, though, the idea of the former lobbyist who abstained from voting on the Conservatives' controversial Welfare Bill last summer successfully winning over Corbyn's zealous supporters seems unlikely.

This briefing was compiled by Ranelagh Political Communications Ltd.

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