

LABOUR'S

NEXT

The 40%
strategy

MAJORITY

Marcus Roberts

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Summary

- The combination of the great recession and the coalition government has opened up new pools of prospective voters for Labour, particularly former Liberal Democrats and new voters (including first time voters and voters who did not vote in 2010).
- Ed Miliband must create a new coalition of voters to deliver him a majority as the New Labour victory recipe of flipping large numbers of Conservatives is not open to him.
- Ed Miliband is an attractive leader to many who voted Lib Dem in 2010 (post-New Labour, anti-Iraq war, anti-tuition fees, pro-civil liberties etc.) and the work his Labour party has begun in re-connecting with non-voters (particularly working class C2DEs) would be invaluable for this voter coalition come 2015.
- Conservative 2010 converts are the smallest pool and the hardest to flip. However, Miliband's decision to select over a hundred parliamentary candidates and recruit more than 200 field organisers up to two years in advance of the election provides an unprecedented opportunity to target and persuade this small but vital pool of voters.
- Organisationally, Labour must embrace community organising, 'big data', candidate-to-Conservative-voter contact, voter registration and best practice 'get out the vote' techniques to win.
- Politically, Labour must address the living standards crisis, which poses the same problems for middle and working class voters alike. This crisis allows Labour to make the same argument to all elements of its electoral coalition.
- If Labour scored 40 per cent nationally and this was reflected in its 106 target constituencies then the party would enjoy a majority of 20.
- Such a result can be achieved by holding onto the vast majority of Labour's 2010 voters (some 27.5 per cent after churn), taking 6.5 points off the Liberal Democrats, adding 5 points of new voters and 1 point from Conservative 2010 voters.

INTRODUCTION

There will be voters who go to the polls on 6th May 2015 who weren't alive when Tony and Cherie Blair posed outside 10 Downing Street on 1st May 1997. They will have no memory of an event which is a moment of history as distant from them as Margaret Thatcher's 1979 election victory was for the voters of 1997. Tony Blair understood that then: he did not try to win the election that Jim Callaghan lost, nor to reconstruct Harold Wilson's winning electoral coalition. If Ed Miliband seeks to emulate what Blair did in 1997, he too must build his own political majority for the era in which he seeks to govern.

Yet the Labour leader has been falsely accused of having a '35 per cent strategy', of hoping to sneak into Downing Street through the back door in an election that nobody wins, rather than to seek his own majority. Such a lack of ambition would be likely to prove fatal to achieving even that modest goal. Labour must campaign for a majority government – particularly if it is to represent a politics of 'one nation'. There are important challenges – especially in rebuilding Labour's reputation on the economy, and on Miliband establishing himself as a prime minister in waiting with the electorate. But there are also solid reasons why the bookmakers currently make him favourite to win the general election. The Labour leader has a much stronger chance of winning a majority than the Westminster orthodoxy acknowledges. Indeed, the most intelligent Conservative commentators from Lord Ashcroft to Paul Goodman, editor of ConservativeHome, acknowledge that David Cameron faces greater hurdles to secure a majority than Ed Miliband does.

This report sets out a plausible strategy for Labour's next majority, one that is secured through winning 40 per cent of the popular vote in May 2015, despite the challenges of a fragmenting electorate. It also challenges the party at all levels to recognise that the 40 per cent strategy for a clear majority in 2015 will require a different winning formula to that which served New Labour so well a generation ago, but which is past its sell-by date in a different political and economic era. Others have proposed varying theories emphasising this or that voter bloc, but none have drawn together all the strands of an electoral coalition tailored to the leadership of Ed Miliband.

This report is clear that Labour's next majority means winning over Conservative voters but they are not likely to be the dominant source of the

votes Labour needs for a clear victory. To insist that a winning Labour strategy must always and only target Tory switchers is now a matter of political superstition borne of old habits. It is not supported by the psephological evidence for 2015, which is radically different from that of 1997.

Miliband has two great new opportunities that rely on a different strategy. The first is his strong appeal to Lib Dem voters feeling betrayed by the coalition. True, in a Labour/Tory marginal every Tory voter converted is worth twice as much as a former Lib Dem, since the switch subtracts from the Tory vote as it adds to Labour's. But this is more than compensated for by the pool of floating former Lib Dems being both larger and more open to Ed Miliband's message. Miliband's second opportunity is Labour's strong focus on new voters and people who didn't vote in 2010. Put the two together and the electoral coalition needed for a majority begins to take shape.

Critical to this report's argument is an understanding that just targeting one voter bloc will not work. Rather Labour needs an all-of-the-above strategy in which all the building blocks come together to win Ed Miliband his majority. This strategy calls for Labour to prioritise Lib Dem votes but also requires the addition of some Tories and a large measure of new voters too.

International examples such as France and America prove that this is the way to win for progressive parties. Both François Hollande and Barack Obama to no small extent picked the electorates they needed to win and got them to the polls through a remarkable combination of data and organising. They rejected the swing-voter-as-god argument of the 1990s and so saw success.

In 1997 a swing voter strategy was as logical as it was efficacious. That is no longer the case. As that great arguer of numbers John Maynard Keynes is reputed to have said: "When the facts change, I change my mind. What do you do?"

Well, when the numbers change, I change my strategy. What do you do?

1

STICKING WITH LABOUR: THE 2010 LABOUR VOTERS NEEDED FOR 2015 VICTORY

There is a debate within Labour circles as to what the party's core base of support is. Optimists argue that 2010 was the lowest it could go whilst pessimists believe support could fall still further.

The answer is that 2010 was Labour's core vote but it was a core vote hard fought for and hard won. And each of these votes must be earned again. No vote can be taken for granted. The organising the party did in seats like Birmingham Edgbaston and Edinburgh South allowed Labour to achieve a 1992 sized share of seats on a 1983 sized share of votes. So come 2015 to retain this core of support the party must understand its 2010 voters in attitudinal and psephological terms and craft its strategy for their retention accordingly.

Attitudinally, these voters were for the most part not only anti-Tory but tribal Labour: they opposed cuts to public spending, rejected the argument that the global crash was somehow Labour's fault and took a measure of pride in the achievements of three terms of Labour government. Geographically, these voters were overwhelmingly urban, Scottish, Welsh, Northern and from London. In class terms, Labour's 2010 voters were roughly split between middle class: 26 per cent AB's and 28 per cent C1s versus 29 per cent C2s and 40 per cent DEs.¹ The working class vote that Labour won was skewed to target constituencies where strong local organising saw C2DE turnout actually increase over the working class turnout lows of 2001 and 2005.²

To establish the starting point for a 40 per cent strategy we must first assess how many of Labour's 2010 voters will vote Labour again in 2015. This number is reduced by both deaths and defections. Previous Fabian analysis showed that Labour can expect to lose roughly 500,000 voters to death between 2010 and 2015.³

The second source of loss for Labour's 2010 vote comes from defections. In particular some sceptics argue that Labour's core vote in 2015 will be diminished due to the loss of those voters biased to favour the governing incumbent. They argue that the stability offered by Gordon Brown and Alistair Darling is not matched by that of Ed Miliband and Ed Balls. But such arguments fail to address the deeply anti-Tory streak of these voters. The re-toxication of the Tory brand (from the millionaires' tax cut to assaults on the NHS) has only confirmed in their eyes the threatened dangers of Cameron's Conservatives.⁴

In this respect, Miliband's 'same old Tories attack line' and the work of grassroots activists in caring for existing Labour supporters is critical to ensuring that the overwhelming majority of Labour 2010 voters turn out for the party again come 2015.

Thus combining both generational churn and the anti-Tory nature of the 2010 vote and Labour can look with confidence towards a core vote of at least 27.5 per cent from which it can build.

2

WINNING LIBERAL DEMOCRAT VOTERS

For Labour to reach 40 per cent its biggest share of new supporters will come from the Liberal Democrats. Depending on likely Lib Dem performance, Labour can expect to add anywhere from 3 to 7 points of support. Achieving 40 per cent calls for Labour to achieve a 6.5 per cent gain from the Lib Dems – an ambitious but plausible goal given that they are the largest available pool of new supporters and are most attitudinally aligned with the Labour party of Ed Miliband.

The question then becomes: what is the likely Lib Dem showing in 2015 and how much of the ex-Lib Dem vote can Labour claim? With the Lib Dems routinely polling at or around 11 per cent (down from 23.5 per cent in 2010) this may seem a simple task at first but we must assume that a number of current Lib Dem defectors will return to the fold come 2015.⁵ Labour must keep the Lib Dem vote to at or under 15 per cent to have a large enough pool of ex-Lib Dem votes to fish in.

The 15 per cent Lib Dem threshold is doubly important as it also marks a likely national inflection point at which Lib Dem vote losses benefit Labour not just in blue/red marginal but in yellow/red contests too. Above 15 per cent it is likely that whilst Labour makes a net gain in blue/red marginal thanks to yellow votes, it is the blues who gain the advantage in terms of yellow/blue contests over and above yellow/red gains.

So in terms of Labour's Lib Dem voter needs, for the party to claim 6.5 points off the Lib Dems then nationally the Lib Dems must be reduced to below 15 per cent. Labour must then win between 60-75 per cent of these ex-Lib Dem voters. The share Labour needs is lower the lower the Lib Dem vote goes and higher the higher the Lib Dem vote goes. Thus, if the Lib Dems score 12.5 per cent nationally in 2015 Labour would need to attract 60 per cent of ex-Lib Dems. But if the Lib Dems score 15 per cent nationally then Labour will need 75 per cent of ex-Lib Dems. Analysis of polling over the last year shows Labour to routinely be claiming at least 60-66 per cent of ex-Lib Dem support with these voters telling pollsters they are extremely unlikely to switch from Labour come 2015.

As tall an order as this may seem, Labour has two great advantages in achieving this. The first is that, as previous Fabian Society research has demonstrated, Lib Dem converts are closely aligned attitudinally with Labour

2010 voters thanks to the repositioning of Labour on a range of issues (civil liberties, apologising for the Iraq war etc.) by Ed Miliband.⁶ Secondly, as Progress noted in its *Marginal Difference* report by psephologist Lewis Baston, the Lib Dem vote is efficiently distributed in Conservative versus Labour marginal seats, meaning there is a large pool of available yellow votes to help turn blue seats red in the key battleground seats of 2015.

In order to keep the Lib Dem vote below 15 per cent Labour must be unrelenting in its attacks not just on the Conservatives, but on the coalition itself. For two years the party's communications have stressed the phrase 'Tory-led government' but such messaging must be careful not to let the Lib Dems off the hook. Explaining the Lib Dems role as the enablers of government cuts, the NHS reorganisation and the millionaires' tax cut will be important to retaining Labour's Lib Dem converts.

Combined with Labour's core support, Lib Dem converts look set to take Labour to the mid-30s and likely largest party status. But Lib Dem converts, though necessary, are not sufficient for a Labour majority. For that another large pool of voters is needed.

3

NON-VOTERS AND NEW VOTERS

New voters represent the second largest pool of supporters required for Labour's 40 per cent strategy. They are divided into three categories: first time voters newly on the electoral roll, young voters who did not vote in 2010 and working class voters who despite historically self-identifying as Labour have seen declining turnout since 1997.

Labour needs to add at least 5 points to its 2010 showing from this new voter pool. Roughly half of this will come from generational churn as first time voters replace Labour voters who have left the electoral roll.⁷ But the remaining two and a half points of new voters that Labour needs must come from increasing turnout amongst young voters above the normal rate of churn and by increasing turnout amongst socio-economic groups D and E, the working class voters who largely sat out the 2010 election.

Thus in the case of first time voters and young voters, Labour will need at least 3 points of young voters to counter the effects of churn. To achieve this Labour will need a policy offer focused on making university affordable (in contrast to the coalition's tripling of tuition fees), tackling record levels of youth unemployment and greatly expanding vocational training. Organisationally, Labour will need to live up to Ed Miliband's rhetoric of promising "the largest voter registration drive in a generation", evidence of which is scant to say the least.

In the case of older non-voters who sat out the 2010 election, Labour will need to deftly handle their concerns on tough issues like immigration and welfare. These voters also worry about Labour on spending and have deep doubts about the power of politics to deliver change.

To re-engage this challenging group, Ed Miliband should draw on Blue Labour-esque ideas like the equal role of responsibility to fairness in Labour's story, of the role that contribution has to play in welfare and the importance of integration to immigration. In policy terms, the living wage, vocational training, tackling the living standards crisis and the urgent need for cheaper rents and greater housing supply will help Labour make a meaningful offer to what might be called blue collar non-voters. But policy generosity must be matched with credibility and thus Labour must be prepared to demonstrate how its plans are fully costed and genuinely affordable.

Organisationally, the party must continue to embrace a return to its community organising roots. The training work conducted by Arnie Graf to reintroduce Labour to low turnout communities not just through leaflets or even canvassing but through local community campaigns that build local capacity and reconnect the party with communities is essential to strategic success.

It is important to note that the new voter pool proves a far greater challenge than the Lib Dem converts, as the attitudinal convergence between non-voters and Labour 2010 voters is weaker than that of ex-Lib Dems and Labour 2010 voters.⁸ Furthermore there are splits within the new voter coalition Labour requires: whilst younger voters tend to be socially liberal and progressive (perfect for Ed Miliband's liberal-left appeal), working class new voters tend to be more socially conservative and have more Conservative party-esque attitudes to issues like welfare, immigration and crime.⁹ Lastly, older voters are more likely to be entrenched in their non-voting habits than young voters.

In chapter 7 we will explore the policy, messaging and organisational solutions required to surmount these challenges.

Nonetheless, we can see how the addition of 5 points of new and non-voters to Ed Miliband's electoral coalition takes Labour to within touching distance of 40 per cent and in all likelihood a technical majority. To achieve a working majority however this strategy will now look to the final voter pool - the smallest but still critical ex-Conservative vote.

4

EX-CONSERVATIVE VOTERS

To reach 40 per cent and a working majority Labour must win one point from the Conservative party. This is the smallest percentage of new support Miliband must win over but it comes from the smallest available pool. Nonetheless, it is essential to Miliband's hopes for a working majority.

The reason why these numbers are as small as they are essential is two fold. Firstly, the available pool of prospective blue to red converts is small indeed. Even during the 'Omnishambles' period of midterm strife for the government, only around 4 per cent of 2010 Conservative voters had switched to Labour. Contrast that with a potential pool of 10-13 points of Lib Dem 2010 voters or 4-8 per cent of potential new voters for Labour.¹⁰

Secondly, the Tories' inevitable bombardment on issues like welfare, immigration, borrowing, taxation, the deficit and 'Prime Ministerialness' will take its toll. Labour can expect to see blue to red converts and considerers switch back to the blues the closer the election comes.

But to retain just one point of these Conservative converts, Labour can play on Cameron's re-toxification of the Tory brand. Miliband can make the case to these voters that whilst they understandably gave Cameron a chance in 2010 when they thought Labour was out of touch and the Conservatives had truly changed, the government's record gives the lie to Cameron's old promises. It is for these voters that the 'same old Tories' line may prove most salient.

In messaging and policy terms, the offer to this voter group should be similar to that of the working class new voters Labour needs: a more Blue Labour-esque position on welfare and immigration that stresses responsibility and integration. But it would be a mistake to attempt to sell this policy agenda to just this group alone. Rather, the need to win this group and the commonality of problems this group has with that of other voters necessitates a coherent and integrated political offer. We shall explore this in more detail in the next chapter.

Organisationally, Labour should use the early selection of its candidates in target seats to ruthlessly and relentlessly target Tory voters. By combining big data targeting (not just commercial data but the latest techniques in voter propensity modeling that played such a crucial role in Obama's 2012 victory)

and local intelligence about the identity of Conservative voters open to persuasion, Labour candidates should have long conversations to personally persuade these voters to trust not just in Ed Miliband or even Labour but in the candidate themselves.¹¹

The pool of necessary converts within a target seat is in the low hundreds, which, when divided up over two years, is an ambitious but achievable target for Labour candidates.

This sliver of ex-Conservative voters, when combined with the larger pools of ex-Lib Dems and new voters, will deliver Ed Miliband a working majority of roughly 20 seats (See appendix 1).

5

THE ED MILIBAND COALITION

Taken crudely, an electoral coalition that attempts to combine Labour's liberal-left base of existing voters, Lib Dem converts and young voters, with 'small c' conservatives in the form of working class voters and ex-Conservative converts might seem contradictory at best. But in the wake of the great recession, the commonality of the problems facing this huge pool of voters and the commonality of the solutions needed provides Ed Miliband with the opportunity to unite what would otherwise be highly disparate groups.

One nation Labour is the manifestation of that attempt. With its policy emphasis on the causes of long term problems in the economy and society alike one nation Labour turns the page on New Labour technocratic management whilst simultaneously exposing the Conservatives as mere managers of decline. Instead it seizes the political ground of both change and hope, occupying the valuable political real estate of optimism, the future and unity. Set against this is a Conservative party increasingly seen as pessimistic and divisive.

The roots of this coalition lie in the living standards crisis. In the wake of the crash of 2008 middle class voters find themselves facing the same sorts of insecurities as working class voters. The issues of housing, utility bills, transport costs, unemployment and declining wages means that previously divided groups are now responsive to the same messages. These will likely focus on work, family and place as Labour seeks to offer the specific and tangible changes to the problems they face everyday.

The 40 per cent strategy is designed to create an electoral coalition for Ed Miliband that is politically, for the most part, more liberal and 'leftish' than that of New Labour. This coalition is in keeping with the widely held assumptions about what the politics and values of Ed Miliband actually are. As such, a coalition of Labour loyalists, disaffected Liberal Democrats, new voters and a tactical sliver of ex-Conservatives is an electorally efficacious and politically authentic strategy.

Mathematically, this strategy is founded on the assumption that Ed Miliband's appeal to Conservatives is limited at best. Furthermore, there is great danger in the Labour leader adopting policy and messaging that strikes voters as inauthentic. Rightwing shifts are thus unlikely to convince a large

number of Conservative converts. Furthermore, such an approach could well endanger the large pools of ex Lib Dem and new voters for whom Miliband's 'liberal leftish' appeal is critical to conversion.

This coalition's coherence is found in opposition to public spending cuts, worry about the living standards crisis, the reorganisation of the NHS, continued anger at the City and an unreformed banking system, and vested interests in a broken private sector, the rise of unemployment and the prevalence of low-pay jobs. Quite simply, the same problems that working class 'small-c' conservative voters (be they Conservative 2010 voters, working class non-voters or recent UKIP converts) face are also faced by middle class 'liberal leftish' voters. Hence the need and opportunity for a politics that appeals to both.

Miliband's challenge is therefore threefold. He has to tap into the genuine angers and anxieties of his voters, persuading them that he shares their concerns and feels their pain. Next he must convince them that these problems are either created or made worse by a Conservative-led government. Finally his biggest challenge is to convince them to trust in Labour's ability to make a difference to their lives.

Thus far, Miliband has mastered the politics of opposition in the sense that everyone knows that he is against what the current government is doing. The Labour party machine, from its MPs to its activists, is well placed and well trained to remorselessly blame and attack the Conservative party for the state of the economy and society at large. But on the biggest challenge of convincing voters that Labour can actually make a difference, Miliband still faces a host of problems from fiscal credibility to disillusionment with politics itself. Miliband is alive to these problems and his approach is four-fold.

First, showing the humility to acknowledge the mistakes of the last government so as to turn the page on New Labour's failures, be it light touch regulation of financial services or the Iraq war. Second, understanding that there must be no no-go areas for Labour. For where once Brownite doctrine divided politics into 'Labour areas' (fairness, the NHS, poverty etc) and 'Tory areas' (crime, immigration, welfare etc.), Miliband believes Labour politics must address all issues, as his frequent speeches on these traditionally more challenging policy areas demonstrate. Third, Miliband has placed great faith in the power of community organising to win back the trust of voters not just by politicians' soundbites on cameras but through activists delivering change on the ground. Finally, with his 2012 'one nation' speech Miliband has made a bold claim to a belief in the ability of politics to change society and the economy alike. His optimism and faith contrast strongly with the austerity and depression of Cameron and Osborne's government of cuts.

Such an approach - based upon a broad appeal to both middle and working class voters alike, with a policy agenda focused on tackling the root causes of problems, and words matched by deeds in the form of change on the ground - constitute the politics of Ed Miliband's one nation Labour.

6

THE ORGANISATION NEEDED TO DELIVER 40%

To unite middle class, progressive, liberal voters with working class, 'small c' conservative voters Labour will need both a politics that unites and an organisation that delivers. The following outlines how a Labour party that embraces both technical innovations as well as a shift from machine politics to mass movement building can achieve 40 per cent.

Identification of target voters

Through a combination of propensity modelling (the statistical technique by which the likelihood to vote for a particular party and/or to vote at all is determined) and canvassing information, a pool of target Tory voters can be created who should receive bespoke communications on their key issues from senior party figures and even more importantly significant amounts of face time from the Labour PPC themselves. In other words, rather than using the candidate as just another tool to harvest voter ID, PPCs should be set individual contact and persuasion targets on a weekly basis and be monitored on their performance.

For Ed Miliband to reach a working majority, Labour needs to run the table on all 106 target seats which will necessitate a greater Tory to Labour switcher number or an even larger defection rate from the Lib Dems or persuasion of non-voters. However, as Conservative majorities of over 4,000, the kind of seat needed for an overall majority, are found predominately in seats in which the Lib Dem vote has often been already heavily squeezed, it is logical that candidates and their campaigns spend more time in these seats focusing on Tory conversion and non-voter persuasion.¹²

In essence, Labour should bank on the national factors of the political and economic fallout of the creation of the coalition and the great recession to deliver a large scale 2010 Lib Dem voter defection. Labour policy and messaging must be careful to attract, solidify and not repel these Lib Dem joiners. Organisationally, Labour activists should focus on re-engaging non-voters and ensuring their turnout in 2015. The techniques of community organising and the party's plans for the recruitment of 200 organisers are key to this success as the complicated politics of the non-voter pool will require far deeper local engagement than traditional voter ID canvassing alone.

Lastly, the Tory target pool should be the overwhelming focus of individual one-to-one contact by the candidates themselves who should be unafraid to spend as much as 20 minutes persuading an individual Tory voter to personally trust them at the next election.

Use of candidates

To see how a candidate to Conservative voter conversion programme would work in practice, let us consider the practical example of the bellwether marginal seat Rossendale and Darwen. In 2010, both the turnout and the party division numbers roughly reflected the national picture (although they were slightly worse for Labour) and the seat was lost to the Tories. Thus if Labour wins this seat and all those on its target list preceding it, the party will have a working majority.

The application of the 40 per cent strategy's formula requires the Labour candidate to convert a number of Conservative voters. In this particular seat, this works out at 532 voters. Assuming the candidate has 18 months until the election, and enjoys a 20 per cent conversion rate from a 30 minute conversation, they would need to spend a total of 500 hours meeting Conservative voters. This works out as 6.5 hours of candidate time devoted to this practice a week.

Build capacity

The Labour party must prioritise hiring field organisers with a mandate to build capacity. Local volunteer recruitment holds the key to local parties that can speak to more voters, take on more community campaigns and run a bigger GOTV (get out the vote) operation. Number of activists rather than number of leaflets must be the key metric tracked by party managers.

Community organising: turning non-voters into Labour voters

The decision of Ed Miliband and Iain McNicol, Labour's general secretary, to empower the Industrial Area Foundation's Arnie Graf to lead a process of training and pilots for community organising marks a real change from the party's previous love affair with command and control centralisation. Graf, the community organiser's community organiser, is also well versed in how to translate low-income voter outreach efforts at the community level into successful GOTV programmes. This approach will be essential for the achievement of a 5 per cent gain in new and non-voters come 2015.

Reforming the crucial voter programme

In the 2010 general election the Labour party enjoyed limited success with a 'crucial voter' targeting programme, which identified key voters in marginal constituencies and the issues that concerned them most. These voters were then sent direct mail from the relevant cabinet members in an attempt to persuade them. For 2015 this useful innovation should be scaled up adding to direct mail, phone calls from relevant shadow cabinet members - even better in the place of what many Labour party organisers consider the wasted effort of organising senior politician visits to half empty church halls for the slight possibility of local paper column inches or even a photograph. Shadow cabinet visits from 2013 right up until polling day should focus on senior politicians spending time on the doorsteps of these crucial voters. Local press coverage should thus become an adjunct to the field operations use of politicians' time rather than the be-all and end-all that it was a generation ago. To this end shadow cabinet members should be assigned call time periods to contact these crucial voters by phone, sign off on direct mail to them and expect to spend the vast majority of their time on constituency visits speaking to this voter pool. Added to the individual candidates' time spend persuading 2010 Tory voters it is clear how an act of will on the part of the Labour leadership and the subsequent deployment of MPs and PPCs to this purpose can convert these voters.

The integration of strategy

Finally, the Labour party must move to unite all elements of its general election effort as never before to create a truly integrated strategy. Field operations and communications can no longer be viewed as separate political fiefdoms, especially in an age in which personal contact by volunteers is more valued by voters than endless printed literature or 12 second TV soundbites. The implications for Labour to fight the 2015 election on the basis of integrating its efforts are profound with changes to budgets, party structures and decision making so as to empower organisers increasingly responsible for the delivery of Labour's message.

7

PROBLEMS WITH THE THEORY

Any electoral strategy that seeks to add real value and be more than a collection of bland platitudes is bound to possess within it its own weaknesses, risky assumptions and potential contradictions. This proposal for a core Labour plus ex-Lib Dem and new voter alliance with the admixture of only a shaving of Tory switchers is no different.

In terms of issues, attitudes and policies, the 40 per cent strategy is imperiled by the more conservative views of many of its C2DE non-voters and Conservative converts – especially on the issues of welfare and immigration. These views directly clash with that of many of the strategy’s Lib Dem and young voter groups. The solutions offered (delicate message management on Labour’s problem issues and a candidate-based response to the Tory challenge) risk destruction in the fierce heat of the Murdoch and Mail press attacks.

Compounding this problem is the rise of UKIP which whilst not drawing significant support in terms of Labour 2010 voters is drawing support from Labour identifying new voters, particularly of the C2DE voter bloc. The effect of this could well be to cap Labour’s new voter growth thus endangering the ability of Ed Miliband’s new electoral coalition to muster 40 per cent.

Furthermore there are inherent dangers in attempting a mechanical fix to a strategic problem that in a bad light a candidate-talks-to-Tories tactic represents. Equally the attempt to re-engage non-voters through community campaigning if not handled with sufficient care and resource could also prove to be too small a mechanical fix to a fundamental problem of politics.

Critics of this strategy may well argue that only a fundamental repositioning of Labour policy and change in Labour messaging might be sufficient to attract back ‘small c’ conservative non-voters and Tories alike whilst resisting the UKIP surge. However, given the reality of Labour positioning on these matters under Ed Miliband’s leadership (and indeed for those of us on the liberal left the very desirability of Miliband’s positioning on these matters) it is unlikely that a viable alternative consistent with both the politics of today’s Labour party and the necessity of focusing primarily on Liberal Democrat 2010 voters and secondarily on other voters exists. Besides, even if Ed Miliband were to adopt such an approach its very inauthenticity would undermine its merits totally whilst simultaneously

diminishing existing LibDem convert support.

Of course this last conceit on my part raises the question, to what extent might Lib Dem converts simply be taken for granted come 2015? The answer to this is two-fold. Firstly, polling analysis from the Fabian Society¹³ to Lord Ashcroft¹⁴ has indicated that a great many Lib Dem converts joined Labour out of strong opposition to the coalition across nearly the complete range of issues. Triangulating towards coalition positioning may very well put at risk these joiners although I accept further research to properly stress test this position is required. My second answer to the question is not just that these ex-Lib Dem voters are useful to Labour's electoral prospects but actually desirable as it means that the marginal voter who Labour needs to win is further to the left.

The 40 per cent strategy is also endangered by the possibility that generational churn may be less than projected and thus Labour could suffer from a smaller natural increase in new voters and a greater than projected decrease in existing voters. Churn projections are based on a long history of elections but an aberration is of course possible. In simple terms, this begs the question: will new young voters turnout in line with the numbers that they have in the past, and will middle class, older Labour voters continue to turnout for the party?

Further problems with the theory include Lord Ashcroft's correct judgement that Labour's rejection of austerity makes winning large numbers of Tories extremely difficult and thus even adding just one per cent of Tory switchers may well prove a challenge. Simply put, we should bear in mind that if in the midst of midterm blues Conservative 2010 voters are not willing to tell a pollster they will vote for Ed Miliband they are unlikely to do so in two years' time.

Critics of Ed Miliband such as Dan Hodges, Phil Collins and Atul Hatwal have denounced his chances of the premiership based upon determinative theories of politics such as 'the economy will recover and that means Cameron will win' or 'elections are presidential and Cameron will beat Ed'. The psephological evidence for such an assertion of faith is limited at best and thus it is difficult to argue with such critics. A historical tour d'horizon indicates a mixed picture of instances in which this was and was not true.¹⁵ Time will simply have to tell.

The veteran pollster and political soothsayer Peter Kellner has noted that no opposition has toppled a government without achieving a twenty point lead at some point. To this two counter-arguments are offered: the first is that more than 18 months yet remain for said mythic lead to emerge and the second is that such leads are far more likely to exist in swing voter dominated elections. But the reduction in the size of the swing voter pool, the growth in importance of the new voter/non-voter pool and the dramatically increased role played by Lib Dem to Labour converts all demonstrate how and why Labour's lead may not soar to twenty points but can remain remarkably

stable.

Expert psephologist Philip Cowley also notes the value of incumbency to sitting MPs. This could potentially translate into up to a 2 per cent bonus for sitting Tory MPs. Strategically, this is yet another reason to dismiss a 35 per cent strategy as its lack of scale leaves it too vulnerable to counters such as incumbency. The incumbency factor also reinforces the importance both of early candidate recruitment and of community campaigning in the battleground seats so as to neutralise the incumbent's advantage by building up the profile of the Labour challenger long in advance of the election and earning the respect of voters for visible acts of community change, undercutting the incumbent advantage in this respect.

Organisationally, the 40 per cent strategy will fail if Labour's reality fails to match its rhetoric. If Arnie Graf-style community organising remains restricted to but a handful of test projects, if party activists continue to practice an addiction to low impact leafleting instead of high impact conversations, if insufficient organisers are hired for the target seats with insufficient time to organize, if data analysis remains stuck in the realm of commercial data rather than voter propensity modeling and so forth. All of this and more would mean failure for Labour in 2015. The party's changes thus far are to be welcomed but the speed and scale of what is still needed must go further and faster for 40 per cent to be achieved.

On the Lib Dem side of the equation the theory faces a serious risk in the case of the Lib Dems mounting a major recovery taking them to the high percentage teens which could well happen in the case of a change of leader. To counter this the Labour party must unceasingly seek to tie the LibDem brand writ large to the grievous damage done by Nick Clegg. Vince Cable, Tim Farron et al must be the subject of strong Labour criticism for their role in these years of Blue/Yellow misrule.

Lastly, the theory of prioritising Lib Dems and new voters with a shaving of Tory switchers could well deliver Labour largest party status as the party captures seats with opposition majorities of under 4,000 but fails to gain Ed Miliband a working majority by capturing enough opposition seats with a majority in the 4,000-5,000 range. It is these predominately Tory seats which often have a Liberal Democrat vote that has already been significantly squeezed in previous elections. Whilst the successful execution of the psephological algebra (+ 6.5 per cent ex-LD + 5 per cent new and non-voter + 1 per cent ex-Conservative) should in theory deliver a Labour majority of 20, but these final 'majority maker' seats are likely to be won on the slimmest of constituency majorities with very little margin of error.

Thus the theory is vulnerable to the accusation that its successful execution will require a remarkable combination of elegant messaging, sophisticated policy, game changing organisation and extraordinary candidates and that the absence of any one element imperils the entire enterprise.

But Labour has no choice but to achieve this. For all the problems discussed

it is my strong belief that the combination of the Great Recession, the political fallout of the coalition and the leadership of Ed Miliband necessitate this strategy. Going from 29.5 per cent to 40 per cent in just five years in opposition is an unprecedented task in post war British politics. Only a high risk/high reward strategy can hope to deliver such a prize.

8

HOW THE VOTERS WE PURSUE SHAPE THE GOVERNMENT WE GET

In the 1980s the Labour party conducted an open and politically bloody civil war over its policy and politics. Direct divisions between left and right, activists and office holders, militants and progressives laid bare Labour's divisions and were a key factor in Labour's long spell in opposition.

In 2013 intra-Labour fights are more civilised, disagreements more nuanced and divisions less dramatic. But fault lines remain as party factions fight proxy wars over the kind of politics they desire or wish to defeat. Policy disagreements are rare in Ed Miliband's Labour party but fault lines nevertheless exist beneath the surface. They manifest most clearly in the argument the party has had throughout 2012 over which voters should be pursued with greatest priority. The reason for this is that the voters Labour chooses to emphasise the pursuit of have different and often competing or even clashing concerns. For instance a New Labour-esque emphasis on Tory/Labour switchers would militate for a series of policies and messaging positions that would appeal to these voters often found in more affluent, southern English constituencies. On the other hand, the pursuit of Labour's lost working-class voters, often found in more northern, economically challenged constituencies would have different policy and messaging implications. Still further as we have seen in Chapter 3 the pursuit of former Lib Dem as the key priority comes with a host of implications of its own.

Thus it is easy to see why what might appear at first as a matter of mere organisational targeting of potential voter pools is actually a fraught political argument as to the very nature of today's Labour party. It is to the credit of all concerned that the debate has been as evidence based and diplomatic as it has been. Particular recognition should go to those willing to publish major research that challenges their own positions foremost of which is the admirable service rendered by Progress in publishing Lewis Baston's report on the efficacy of targeting ex-Liberal Democrats (and indeed some non-voters) as a path back to power.¹⁶ Progress might have been expected to have only published research that supported their own world view of New Labour centre-ground politics but instead provided data-rich findings demonstrating quite the contrary.

The relationship between a party's psephological strategy and its politics is further evidenced by the important intervention Ed Miliband made during

his leadership campaign in which he was amongst the first to argue that New Labour had seen the party's core vote become its swing vote with a dramatic loss of support less to the Tories and more to the Lib Dems, other parties and non-voting.¹⁷ This argument was later popularised as the '5 million votes' theory and Paul Hunter of the Smith Institute produced excellent research on the nature of Labour's lost votes.¹⁸

Building on Miliband's, Baston's and Hunter's work this report has argued for the pursuit of primarily former Lib Dem voters, secondarily non-voter, and finally Tories. In the first instance, socially liberal, anti-Iraq war, pro-civil liberties, anti-marketisation of public services, anti-cuts, pro-stimulus positioning is the logical implication of the large pool of ex-Lib Dem voters Labour requires. The second pool of non-voters are far more complicated. These voters are primarily from socio-economic groupings C2, D and E and as Labour party strategist Hopi Sen has noted often possess strong 'non-Labour' views on issues like immigration and welfare. The extremely careful balancing act Ed Miliband's speeches on immigration represented between a liberal pro-immigration values stance and an increased concern for the economic implication and cultural integration needs that the issue poses must be maintained right through the general election. In other words, Miliband must show non-voting C2DEs that he shares their concerns and will act on the issue whilst not engaging in the kind of populist rhetoric or pro-immigration cap policies that may lose him critical liberal ABC1 support. So too on welfare Miliband has made strong running by linking the idea of responsibility at the top and the bottom of society as the common thread connecting unjustified bankers bonuses with those who abuse the welfare system. Again, Miliband has sought to neatly acknowledge the concerns of crucial voters in one part of his coalition whilst not alienating another. It is thus easy to see why such a delicate balancing act does not easily translate into pledge card ready policy or doorstep soundbites. Nevertheless, Ed Miliband's Labour must continue to walk this tightrope to maintain the critical but delicate alliance of former Lib Dems and non-voters essential to 90 per cent of Labour's new found support.

Thus we see how Labour's liberal leftist politics under Ed Miliband can secure its largest pool of target ex-Lib Dem voters; how Labour activists armed with a careful script on challenging issues like welfare and immigration, as well as more traditionally Labour friendly talking points on issues like the NHS, can reactivate a substantial pool of non-voters, particularly through the application of community and organising techniques that emphasise listening and local action on local priorities; and lastly how Labour candidates can be charged with the principal responsibility for converting a small but crucial pool of Conservatives.

Taken together, this approach should deliver 40 per cent of the national vote and with it, Labour's next majority.

APPENDIX 1: VOTER POOLS FOR TARGET CONSTITUENCIES

The figures below focus on changing vote share between Labour, Conservative and Lib Dem 2010 voters and 2010 non-voters in constituencies currently held by one of the three major political parties. Changing vote share for UKIP, the Greens and nationalist parties (SNP, Plaid Cymru) are not accounted for and will not be reported.

Figures are calculated based on the following changes of vote:

- Labour gains 6.5 points from the 2010 Lib Dem vote
- Labour gains 5 points from new voters and/or 2010 non-voters
- Labour gains 1 point from the 2010 Conservative vote
- Labour loses 2 points from their 2010 vote to generational churn

Winning party	Target seat number	Projected Lab majority	Projected Lib Dem pool	Projected new voter pool	Projected Tory pool
● Warwickshire North	1	3247	1425	2139	513
● Thurrock	2	3938	1274	2986	455
● Hendon	3	3601	1491	2484	530
● Cardiff North	4	3513	2268	1676	482
● Sherwood	5	3528	1894	2103	519
● Norwich South	6	8478	3630	2440	294
● Stockton South	7	3595	1976	2202	529
● Broxtowe	8	3471	2316	1806	556
● Lancaster & Fleetwood	9	3905	2123	2307	416
● Bradford East	10	7947	3546	2306	293
● Amber Valley	11	3241	1725	2264	479
● Waveney	12	3327	1771	2561	555
● Wolverhampton South West	13	2546	1672	1747	441

	Target seat number	Projected Lab majority	Projected Lib Dem pool	Projected new voter pool	Projected Tory pool
● Marcambe & Lunesdale	14	2890	1506	2444	487
● Carlisle	15	2837	1707	2156	448
● Stroud	16	2685	2328	1899	639
● Weaver Vale	17	3147	2131	2177	458
● Lincoln	18	3781	2407	2601	463
● Plymouth South & Devonport	20	4250	2816	2716	406
● Dewsbury	21	3021	2379	2328	510
● Warrington South	22	4475	3924	2273	530
● Brent Central	23	10621	5207	2686	137
● Bedford	24	3013	2329	2191	474
● Brighton Kemptown	25	2714	2000	2179	438
● Pudsey	26	2734	2658	1886	510
● Brentford & Isleworth	27	3986	3307	2785	541
● Hove	28	2973	2922	2048	494
● Enfield North	29	1604	1405	2039	508
● Hastings & Rye	30	2435	2035	2545	553
● Manchester Withington	31	10203	5229	2743	135
● Burnley	32	7559	3882	2316	188
● Ipswich	33	2725	2225	2696	496
● Dunbartonshire East	35	8032	4823	1482	201
● Halesown & Rowley Regis	36	1398	1694	1843	489
● Nuneaton	37	1761	1780	2168	500
● Gloucester	38	2670	2539	2670	547
● Northampton North	39	2946	2925	2018	371
● Bury North	40	1682	1988	2038	488
● Kingswood	41	1274	2099	1726	523

	Target seat number	Projected Lab majority	Projected Lib Dem pool	Projected new voter pool	Projected Tory pool
● Erewash	42	1633	2169	2058	508
● Blackpool North & Cleveleys	43	1540	1404	2377	458
● City of Chester	44	1831	2322	2182	513
● Croydon Central	46	1241	1704	2495	528
● Worcester	47	1657	2477	2231	523
● Keighley	48	517	1835	1702	540
● Wirral West	49	685	1724	1466	452
● Cannock Chase	50	1484	2010	2707	493
● Loughborough	51	1025	2516	2306	593
● Harrow East	52	413	1781	2104	579
● Warwick & Leamington	53	522	2334	1755	564
● Birmingham Yardley	54	7661	4202	2943	212
● Swindon South	55	965	2159	2384	532
● Ealing Central & Acton	56	1831	3391	2155	484
● Pendle	57	777	2365	1999	473
● Stevenage	58	609	1932	2271	499
● Elmet & Rothwell	59	-127	2368	2051	642
● Edinburgh West	60	6037	4338	1750	291
● Watford	61	2536	4645	2393	521
● Carmarthen West & South Pembrokeshire	62	-506	1271	1646	450
● Vale of Glamorgan	63	-360	1925	2014	549
● Argyll & Bute	64	5062	3716	2053	293
● Dumfriesshire, Clydesdale & Tweeddale	65	146	2361	1939	471
● Norwich North	67	225	2024	2080	467
● High Peak	68	186	2858	1975	556

	Target seat number	Projected Lab majority	Projected Lib Dem pool	Projected new voter pool	Projected Tory pool
● Milton Keynes South	69	294	2545	2920	622
● Rossendale & Darwen	70	198	2221	2440	532
● Cleethorpes	71	220	2130	2361	511
● Somerset North East	72	-344	2973	1559	571
● Great Yarmouth	73	-88	1609	2549	501
● Dudley South	74	-172	1557	2095	444
● Dover	75	-1150	2070	2005	599
● Colne Valley	76	633	4057	2315	552
● South Ribble	77	-1335	1890	2278	632
● Peterborough	78	-122	2292	2370	490
● Stafford	79	-1353	2135	1910	595
● Stourbridge	80	-990	2011	2095	544
● Harlow	81	-1092	1557	2216	532
● Aberconwy	82	-445	1504	1368	290
● Ilford North	83	-1416	1551	2371	581
● Preseli Pembrokeshire	84	-1358	1497	1664	457
● Brigg & Goole	85	-1210	1668	2195	531
● Crewe & Nantwich	86	-1294	1991	2678	632
● Bristol North West	87	370	4119	2163	516
● Battersea	88	-1642	1866	2386	624
● Finchley & Golders Green	89	-1425	2089	2203	586
● Calder Valley	90	-541	3390	2349	551
● Redcar	91	6217	4928	2353	153
● Crawley	92	-1680	1779	2363	574
● Hornsey & Wood Green	93	7626	6655	2217	248
● Reading West	94	-1102	2482	2299	554

	Target seat number	Projected Lab majority	Projected Lib Dem pool	Projected new voter pool	Projected Tory pool
● Rugby	95	-1427	2453	2005	564
● Burton	96	-1792	2052	2342	599
● Cardiff Central	97	5054	3894	2339	211
● Basildon South & Thurrock East	98	-1563	1554	2537	530
● Tamworth	99	-1628	1954	2391	573
● Redditch	100	-1569	2015	2109	517
● Chatham & Aylesford	101	-2165	1516	2259	546
● Swindon North	102	-2014	2254	2626	605
● Cambridge	103	4572	5101	2297	346
● Bermondsey & Old Southwark	104	5098	5613	3083	206
● Bristol West	105	4262	6914	2560	275
● Leeds North West	106	959	5370	2049	312

These figures are calculated on the basis of applying national vote share to individual constituencies, based on the 2010 vote for each party. Majority and projected voter pool numbers should be treated as indicative rather than predictions. While our model indicates which seats are likely to be won based on national vote share for the Labour party in the next general election, that does not mean that other seats may not also be won. Many seats outperformed Labour nationally and 2010 and we exhort candidates and organisers in seats that we project will remain blue to use the voter pool information provided, as well as the campaign methodologies outlined in chapter six, to do likewise.

Endnotes

- 1 <http://www.ipsos-mori.com/researchpublications/researcharchive/poll.aspx?oltemId=2613&view=wide>
- 2 General Election Co-ordinator report to Labour Party conference, September 2010
- 3 <http://www.fabians.org.uk/the-youth-vote-grey-vote-and-generational-churn/>
- 4 <http://lordashcroftpolls.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/11/PROJECT-RED-ALERT.pdf>
- 5 <http://lordashcroftpolls.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/03/WHAT-ARE-THE-LIBERAL-DEMOCRATS-FOR.pdf>
- 6 <http://www.fabians.org.uk/2015-victory-in-labours-grasp-as-ed-unites-the-left/>
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- 9 <http://www.fabians.org.uk/the-core-vote-swing-vote/>
- 10 <http://lordashcroftpolls.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/11/PROJECT-RED-ALERT.pdf>
- 11 <http://www.technologyreview.com/featuredstory/509026/how-obamas-team-used-big-data-to-rally-voters/>
- 12 Baston, Marginal Difference http://www.progressonline.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2012/09/Marginal-Difference_Final.pdf
- 13 <http://www.fabians.org.uk/2015-victory-in-labours-grasp-as-ed-unites-the-left/>
- 14 <http://lordashcroftpolls.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/11/PROJECT-RED-ALERT.pdf>, p. 11.
- 15 For example in 1997 Blair/Brown trailed Major/Clarke on the economy whilst in 1979 Thatcher trailed Callaghan on 'Prime Ministerialness'.
See: <http://www.ipsos-mori.com/researchpublications/researcharchive/poll.aspx?oltemID=22&view=wide> and <http://www.newstatesman.com/uk-politics/2013/08/why-do-miliband-haters-carp-and-groan-hes-favourite-rest-noise>
- 16 http://www.progressonline.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2012/09/Marginal-Difference_Final.pdf.
- 17 <http://www.leftfootforward.org/2010/08/labours-lost-votes/>
- 18 <http://www.smith-institute.org.uk/file/Winning%20back%20the%205%20million.pdf>

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LABOUR'S NEXT MAJORITY |

THE 40% STRATEGY

Marcus Roberts

There will be voters who go to the polls on 6th May 2015 who weren't alive when Tony and Cherie Blair posed outside 10 Downing Street on 1st May 1997. They will have no memory of an event which is a moment of history as distant from them as Margaret Thatcher's 1979 election victory was for the voters of 1997. If Ed Miliband seeks to emulate what Blair did in 1997, he too must build his own political majority for the era in which he seeks to govern.

This report sets out a plausible strategy for Labour's next majority, one that is secured through winning 40 per cent of the popular vote in May 2015, despite the challenges of a fragmenting electorate. It also challenges the party at all levels to recognise that the 40 per cent strategy for a clear majority in 2015 will require a different winning formula to that which served New Labour so well a generation ago, but which is past its sell-by date in a different political and economic era.

A FABIAN REPORT

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