

Excursions

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Essays: *(Re)Connecting Academia*

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A Politics PhD Student's Experience of Reaching Out

James Prentice

University of Sussex

As a politics research student focusing on voting behaviour, there is ample opportunity for me to publish my work to wider non-academic audiences. Moreover, as my thesis focuses on explaining electoral change in the 2019 UK general election, this has allowed me to present my work to non-academic audiences interested in politics at a time where public interest would likely be high. During the 2019 election, I decided to put my thesis' theoretical framework to the test as the election provided me with a real-time scenario that could check the robustness of my theories' prediction, which stated Labour's base was being squeezed. In particular, the key marginal constituency of Hastings & Rye on the Sussex coast allowed me to test my hypothesis, which asserted Labour was losing its working-class base to the Conservative Party, and from this would lose the election. To do this, I conducted two small polls which took samples across the constituency. This allowed me to identify what was happening to the Labour vote and which party was benefitting from any changes in voting patterns. Both the polls I took in the summer and November demonstrated Labour was losing parts of its traditional working-class base to the Tories and segments of its new liberal middle-class base to the Lib-Dems.

After publishing these findings in a local online and printed newspaper, I presented the details of my work to a hustings event in early

December at Hastings college, which had an audience of around 100-150 people. Sadly, it turned out this audience contained many Labour Party members and the report I gave of Labour's high likelihood of losing the local seat and entire election did not go down well. After being heckled for a while, I got through my presentation and afterwards more neutral members of the audience thanked me for the interesting presentation. This made the effort worthwhile. During the publication of my research, two BBC journalists investigating the Hastings & Rye seat became aware of the research I had conducted. They interviewed me about my experiences in trying to engage with a wider audience on social media and I informed them about the positive and negative feedback I had received online. Some of this discussion trended in an article on the BBC news website during the election and gave my research wide non-academic coverage, albeit for a short period.

After this mostly positive experience, I decided to create a blog aiming to make the findings from my thesis more digestible to a wider audience interested in political and current affairs. Since doing this, I have gained a small but consistent localised audience through local social media political pages. I am currently applying for funding from my University to update my website so I can display the graphics I made from my thesis in greater quality. I feel this will make findings from my research into the 2019 general election even more accessible to non-academic audiences.