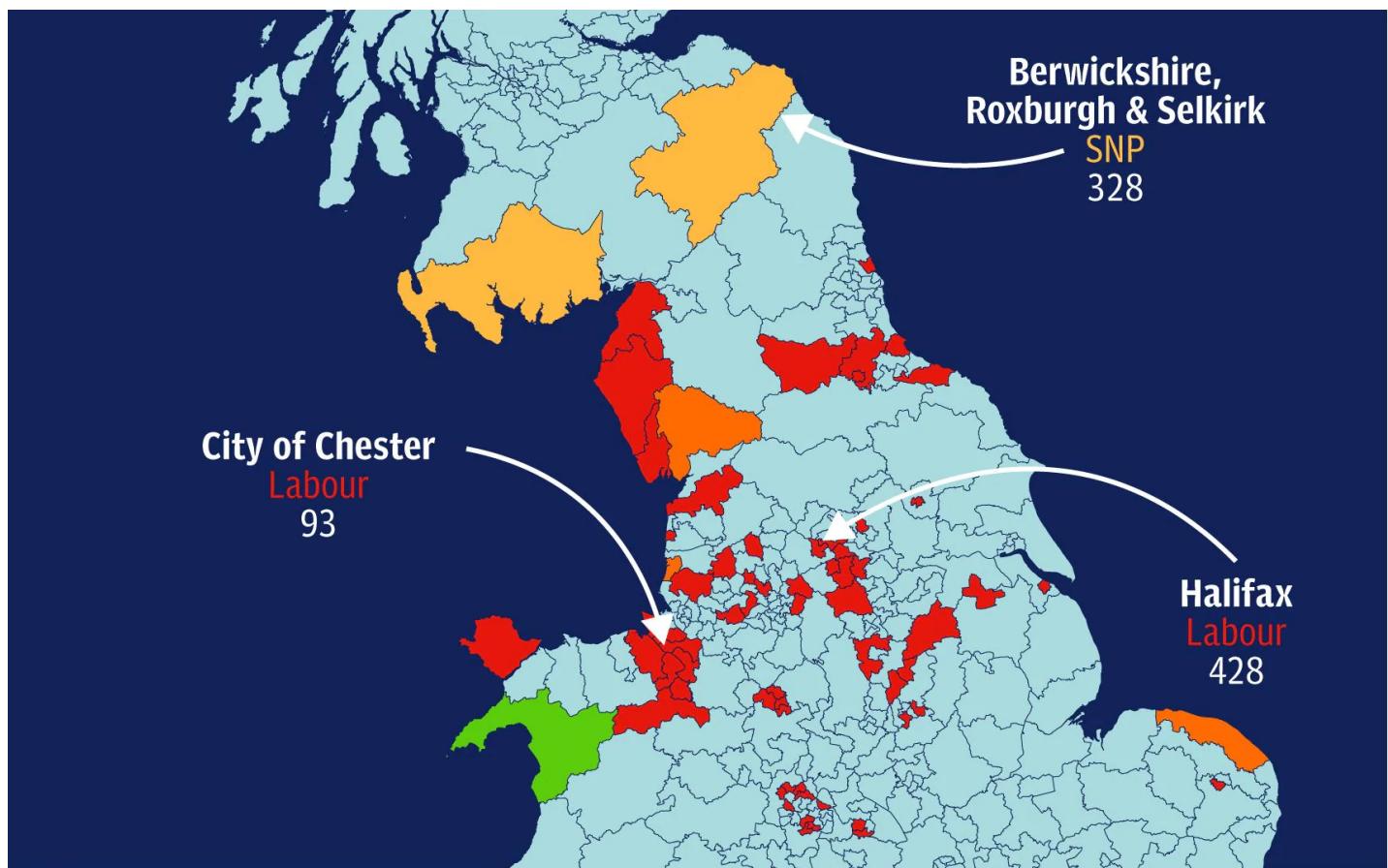


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What Theresa May's campaign stops tell us about her failed strategy



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By **Serla Rusli**

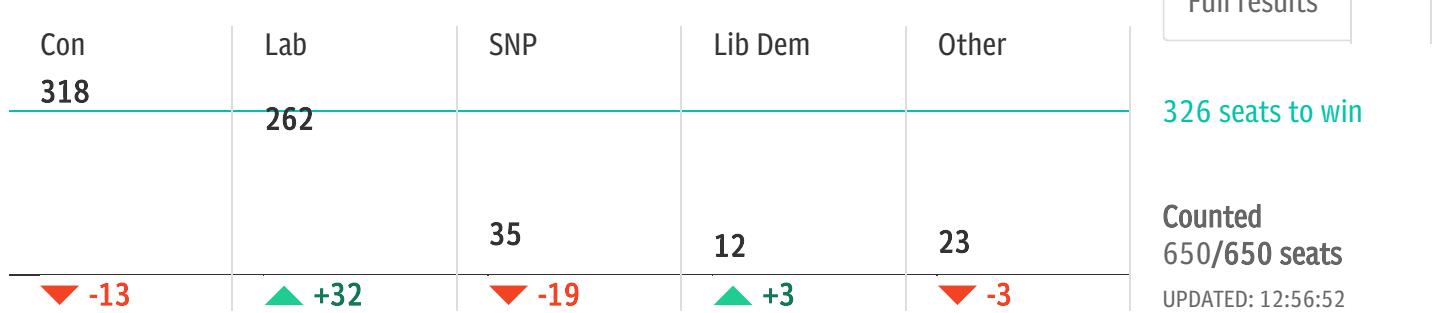
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Theresa May's disastrous election campaign was underpinned by a failure to gauge just how fast Labour's support was increasing, an analysis of her constituency visits has shown.

The 2017 General Election left the UK with a hung Parliament

(<https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/general-election-results-2017-maps-breakdown/>), ending with May's Conservative Party losing their majority and winning only 318 seats - eight short of the majority target of 326.

Election results | Seats won



May conceded her grip on seats all over the country (<https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/0/general-election-2017-results-analysis-theresa-may-lost-majority/>), many of which were in Remain-backing urban areas such as London and Bristol.

Her aggressive campaigning strategy, influenced by her strong lead in the initial polls (<https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/0/general-election-did-polls-get-wrong-failing-see-theresa-mays/>) and confidence over her Brexit strategy, may have been one of the main reasons behind her downfall.

An aggressive series of campaign stops may have been misplaced

At the start of the campaign the Prime Minister was being very ambitious with the places that she chose to campaign, parking her tank on Labour's lawn in heartlands such as the North East and the Midlands.

Buoyed by a whopping polling lead and imposing leadership scores, May was gunning on the Leave-voting Labour supporters (<https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/0/target-seats-ones-watch-general-election-2017how-theresa-may/>) in the North East and the North West of England swinging towards Conservatives.

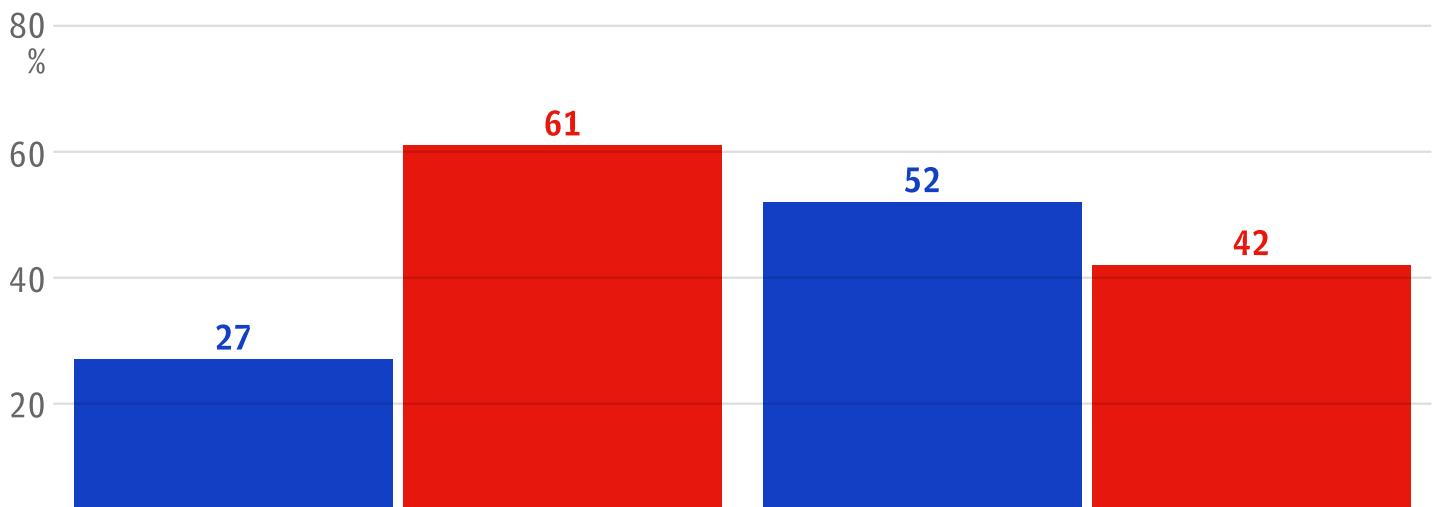
Moreover, the party's strong performance in the North East at the local elections seemed to justify her tactic.

She visited a total of 62 constituencies during the campaign period, 38 of which were Labour seats.

61% of May's visits were to Labour constituencies

Percentage of campaign stops by majority party

◆ Conservative ◆ Labour



The Conservative manifesto launch was the turning point

May's confidence tapered off over the weeks, especially after the Conservative manifesto - branded as one of the worst manifestos in history by George Osborne - launch on 18 May.

There was a squeeze in the poll lead after this event, with policies such as the 'dementia tax' seen as hugely offputting among voters.

This narrowing of the polls continued as election day approached, with the momentum seemingly swinging away from the Prime Minister towards Jeremy Corbyn.

UK General Election 2017 - what were the pollsters predicting?

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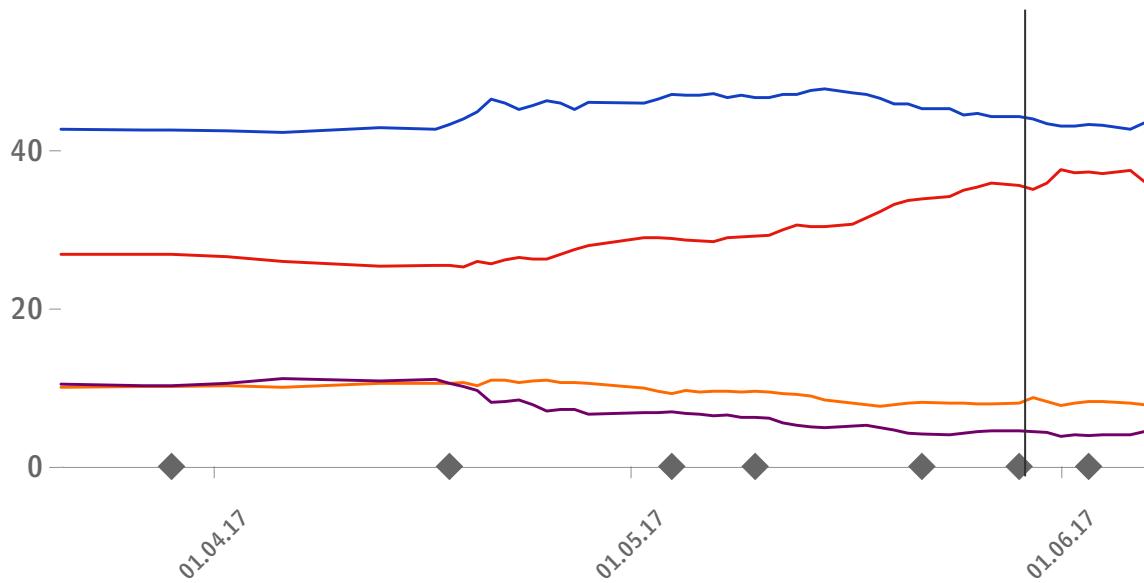
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Con: 43.4%

Lab: 36%

LD: 7.8%

UKIP: 4.4%

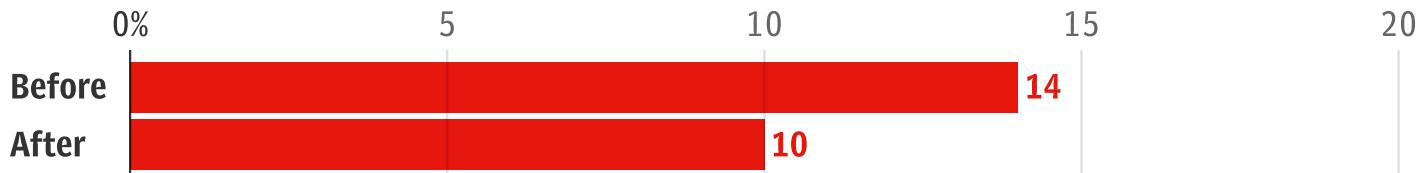


The tightening race does seem to have changed the way that Theresa May was campaigning - but not in a way that was proportional to the Labour surge.

Instead of defending vulnerable Tory seats, she continued to pounce on safe Labour constituencies. After the manifesto launch, she visited only seven Conservative seats and stopped at twice as many at Labour seats.

This indicates that Conservative HQ's internal polling data was way off the mark when it came to gauging how close the race actually was in the final days.

May continued targeting Labour safe seats even after manifesto launch
Average % majority at targeted Labour constituencies



The Prime Minister continued to target solidly Labour areas

While she did rein in her ambition by targeting Labour seats with smaller majorities, the Prime Minister remained overly optimistic. Up until the last week of her campaign, she continued visiting Labour strongholds such as Hemsworth, where Labour had had a firm grip of 29 per cent majority in the 2015 election.

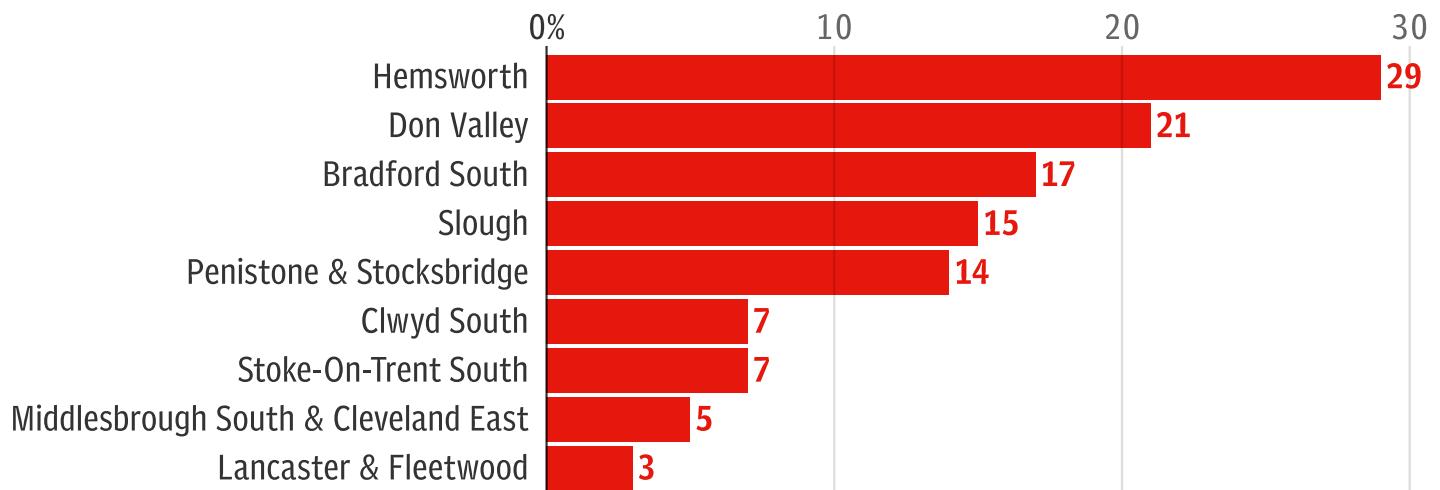
Prior to the manifesto launch the Labour-held constituencies visited by May had an average majority of 14 per cent. After the manifesto this slipped to 10 per cent indicating that Conservative HQ was still expecting to benefit from a swing of around five per cent from Labour.

In reality, of course, there was a swing from the Conservatives towards Labour throughout most of the country.

In this sense, May's campaign miscalculation bore a striking resemblance to that of Hillary Clinton (<https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2017/01/09/hillary-clintons-digital-strategy-helped-lead-election-defeat/>) who campaigned in relatively firmly held Republican states instead of ensuring that she retained the base of support build up by Obama.

May still eyed Labour strongholds in the last week of campaign

Percentage majorities at targeted Labour seats



Questions to answer in Tory HQ

A shock YouGov poll on 30 May predicted the possibility of a hung Parliament, when other polls showed double-digit lead for the Tories.

At the time, the analysis was dismissed by Jim Messina, May's advisor, as 'stupid'. Yet their estimates that the Tories would lose 20 seats were not wildly off the mark as May eventually lost 13 in the election.

"Sometimes political insiders really do have access to better data and analysis than the public polls. But not this time," wrote YouGov in their post-election analysis.

Labour seats accounted for 61 per cent of May's campaign stops, a much more aggressive move compared to Corbyn's, whose visits to Labour and Conservative held seats were a lot more balanced.



Matthew Goodwin

@GoodwinMJ

Make no mistake. Nobody in the Cons saw this coming.

Strategists publicly ridiculed the YouGov model. Source: "CCHQ were sure of a big win".

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The Prime Minister only managed to convert four of the constituencies she visited to the Conservatives, the biggest achievement being Mansfield where Labour previously had 11.8 per cent majority.

Her defensive stops at 17 Conservative seats yielded poor results as well, with the Conservatives losing six to Labour and the Liberal Democrats. May even lost Oxford West & Abingdon, a seat where Conservatives had previously won by a 16.7 per cent margin in the 2015 election.

The 2017 election will be cause for soul searching within Tory HQ, and especially when it comes to how they failed to see the strength of Labour's surge.

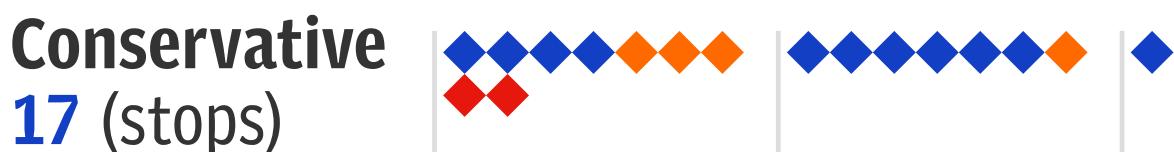
Theresa May's campaign targets

*Constituency campaign stops prior
to general election*

Winning party at 2017 election

◆ Con ◆ Labour ◆ Lib Dem ◆ SNP ◆ DUP

(Majority) (stops)	0-10% 32 (stops)	10-20% 21	20%+ 9
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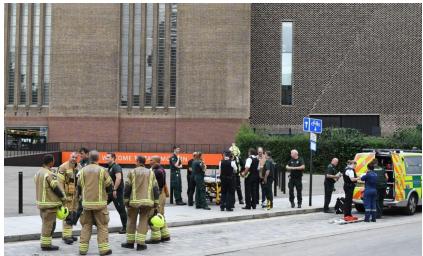


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