**Grace Dewar Higher Politics- 12 mark extended response**

**“Analyse the impact of the dominant ideas of a political party on its electoral performance” (12 marks)**

The key ideas of political parties have the ability to change the course of an election and inevitably can have a big impact on electoral performance. For the Labour Party, the key idea of democratic socialism has played a role in the party’s electoral performance in contemporary times, and most recently it can be said that Jeremy Corbyn’s socialist stance played a part in his utter failure in the 2019 General Election. The significant ideas of the Conservative Party have also had an impact on their electoral performance; Thatcherism was a key idea that arguably led to electoral success for both the 1979 and 1983 elections.

The first key idea to analyse, however, is the idea of democratic socialism and how this had an impact on recent elections. Democratic socialists really see their role now as governing on behalf of the working class and therefore pursuing social justice but at the same time being careful not to risk the achievements of market capitalism. The Labour Party had believed it possible to be a party who were able to serve the interests of both the working class and the bourgeoise middle-upper class. It is often said that the post-war Labour government in the UK is a good example of the idea of democratic socialism in practice. After electoral success in 1945, Clement Atlee’s government implemented, what many would view as, democratic socialist policies. For instance, there was the introduction of a welfare state and the nationalisation of many industries and services.

However, to analyse the impact that the idea of democratic socialism has had on the Labour Party’s electoral performance, we can take Jeremy Corbyn as an example as he is a contemporary politician who ascribes to this key idea. His longstanding democratic socialist stance has been at the heart of ‘Corbynism’ and as such, his policies reflected this stance. Their 2019 manifesto appeared to cater to the needs of all in society; free care for the elderly, free university tuition fees and reducing the voting age to 16 serve as examples in this context. However, the 2019 election was a landslide for the Conservatives and left Corbyn and his party in an awful position. It can be said that some of his policies had a bearing on this result. His perhaps more socialist policy of the nationalisation of several key industries can be analysed. Corbyn wanted to bring rail companies, energy supply networks, water systems and mail delivery into public ownership. In doing this, Labour would be reversing many of the privatisation campaigns of Margaret Thatcher that began in the 1980s. It can be said that many voters, middle class especially, saw this policy as going backwards, being anti-capitalist and quite extreme. It therefore can be argued that this democratic socialist policy did lead to the Labour party losing votes and ultimately contributing to their election loss as many would be fearful of this ‘step’ towards socialism. Corbyn also failed to appeal to the votes of the middle class with his promise to abolish the charitable status of Private Schools. In reality, it can be argued that this policy would only make private schools more exclusive and elitist which may even have lost him the votes of some lower-class voters. We are able to see the clear impact that these socialist policies had on the election result as Corbyn only secured 29% of the vote from the ‘AB’ (higher societal classes) category. This could mean that his policies were seen as too left-wing and shows that his policies did not appeal to all classes, which was his intent. However, this data also highlights the fact that Corbyn did not actually win any of the other classes. Surprising as this is, because Labour had always been seen as a party for the working class, it shows that there were clearly other factors in this monumental loss.

Other factors in this loss must be considered. The issue of Brexit was of paramount significance. Corbyn’s insistence on a second EU referendum did not appeal to hardline Brexiteers and may have alienated approximately half of the electorate. Many previous Labour supporters turned their back on the party as they felt that the party had refused to listen to them and implement the referendum result, and this view was backed up by Ian Lavery ex-chair of the Labour party, who said that ignoring the wishes of 17.4 million voters was “not a good recipe”. It could be argued that this wish for another referendum led to him losing many votes as it, regardless of other factors, undermined democracy which is such an important principle to many UK citizens. Furthermore, Corbyn did not actually campaign for or against Brexit which conceivably harmed his campaign as voters felt as if his stance was ambiguous. On a more personal level, the media did not paint Corbyn in the most positive light with him being branded as untrustworthy and a weak leader. His past ‘support’ for the Irish Republican movement did not sit well with older voters, which even led to many painting him out as a ‘terrorist sympathiser’. Lastly, the media were able to continue running with their ‘untrustworthy’ narrative as he failed to come out and categorically deny claims of anti-Semitism within the party. Overall, it can be said that while the ideas of democratic socialism and Corbynism did have an effect on the outcome of the 2019 election, perhaps of more significance were other factors such as Brexit and questions over his own character as Labour lost votes across all social classes, not just the middle class.

The dominant ideas within the Conservative Party have also had an impact on elections, specifically the ideas of Thatcherism. Margaret Thatcher’s time in office led to her becoming one of the most influential figures in the history of British politics. In essence, Thatcherism is a belief in free markets and a ‘small state’; the government should have limited involvement. A Thatcherite policy was to cut taxes, and this of course won her a lot of support from the bourgeoisie who would want to keep their own money and would likely be opposed to more left-wing policies, such as progressive taxation. While this policy did promote hard work (a core conservative belief) it also led to increasing socio-economic inequalities in society. Despite this, the Conservatives still managed to win 59% of the votes from the AB category and 41% of C voters, contributing to their electoral success in 1979 and arguably showing the positive impact Thatcherite policies like this had for the Conservative Party. Thatcher also introduced the privatisation of state-owned industries such as BT and British Gas, with the aim of increasing efficiency. It can be said that this contribute to a second success in the 1983 General Election, where the Conservatives gained 397 seats, up 58 on the previous election because many middle-class voters were attracted by the profit motive and others believed privatisation would lead to better running of the country. However, again similarly to the idea of democratic socialism within the Labour Party, other factors contributed to the outcome of the election. The so called ‘Winter of Discontent’ took place during the 1979 election campaign and was characterised by widespread strikes by private sector trade unions who were demanding pay rises greater than those which previous Labour leader [James Callaghan](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/James_Callaghan) and his [Labour Party](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Labour_Party_(UK)) government had allowed. Thatcher was seen as a powerful and strong-willed leader which led to her achieving many votes as voters though she would deal with these issues better than Callaghan did. The Falklands war which preceded the 1983 election also contributed massively to Thatcher’s electoral success as before the war her popularity was waning. The Falklands war secured her many votes as she used it as a tool to draw upon British patriotism, and many were able to turn a blind eye to some of her more controversial policies because of this. It can be concluded that the **ideals** of Thatcherism had more of an impact on the Conservative electoral success during this time than Corbynism had a negative effect on Labour’s results, even though Thatcher and her party were helped by other factors.

Overall, it is clear that the dominant ideas of political parties do have an impact on elections and this has been shown by analysing the impact that the significant ideas of both the Labour and Conservative parties. However, it should be noted that these ideas are not the sole reason for a party’s electoral success and there are often other mitigating factors that also contribute.

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