Transcript: Q&A

UKIP, the Radical Right and the European Parliament Elections

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Question 1:
I was very interested by Joe’s slides that showed the rise and rise of UKIP and Nigel Farage actually seems to have closed the gap on the in-or-out question, and that the outs were ahead all the way through the last two years. It now seems to be neck-and-neck between the ins and the outs – the ins are coming back. I wondered what you thought was going on there. I noticed in the most recent poll, the over-60s would get out of Europe but everyone who isn't over 60 currently wouldn’t. So does UKIP have a problem with people who don’t remember Britain outside the European Union, who have cast their first vote after 1972?

Sarah Montague:
Do you want to tell us the polling on that, first of all?

Joe Twyman:
The most recent polling essentially shows things neck-and-neck in terms of –

Sarah Montague:
On in or out of the EU?

Joe Twyman:
Actually I have the precise figures here, if you’re particularly interested. It’s 42 per cent would vote to remain in the EU, 36 per cent to leave, but it's fluctuating around the sort of 38-38 point.

Sarah Montague:
And is it possible to pick apart the age of who’s voting?
Joe Twyman:
It’s certainly possible to say that younger people are more pro-EU, older people tend to be anti-EU. But the crucial point I would make is it’s actually not about the in-out question, to my mind. Instead what it’s about is what I would characterize as the ‘in, out, shake it all about’ question. When you give people the option of: do you just want to leave or do you want to stay? Then you get this result. If you ask people, do you want to leave completely, do you want to stay, or do you want a renegotiation, then a majority of people – over half the British people – say they would like some form of renegotiation. Of course, the format that that renegotiation takes is very much up for debate. What satisfies one person will not satisfy another. But there is this desire for renegotiation far stronger than a desire for leaving in the polls at the moment.

Nigel Farage:
I think there are some very strong similarities between these opinion polls now and what we saw with the euro in the late 1990s and heading into 2001-2002. If you remember, it was 50-50 – should Britain join the euro or not, it was 50-50. We then had a big national debate and there was a huge change of opinion, and that change of opinion included not just the older voters but the younger voters too. We haven’t had a debate about the European question and we’re now beginning to have it. So I think most young people have not been exposed to a different argument and I think once they are, there will be more of them that say we shouldn’t be there.

Sarah Montague:
Okay, so you’re old white men now but you won’t be once you’ve had the debate.

Nigel Farage:
We were a party of high Tories and very middle class. As we’ve expanded, our expansion amongst working-class voters has now overwhelmed that middle-class support. I think the two areas where we’re doing badly – we’re not doing as well with young people, we’re not doing as well with women. But there’s no reason to think that that can’t change.
Sarah Montague:
Do you know why you’re not? What’s your belief as to why you’re not attracting young people and women?

Nigel Farage:
The women question is easy. If you actually look at the representatives of UKIP and some of the things they’ve said, it is looked to be repugnant to women. That will change. That will change on 25 May when pro rata we’ll have more women elected than any other party in the European Parliament. It’s happened without any positive discrimination, without any all-female shortlists. It’s happened because the party itself is changing.

Laura Sandys:
I think your party is quite well controlled from the centre, so I’m sure there has been some design in this. But it is about the shrillness of the party that does put certain people off. Let’s be frank: this is an important minority party. It is not the majority of public opinion that vote UKIP. On the EU issue, I had an extraordinary experience. Fishermen are not necessarily considered the most pro-EU group of constituents. I was talking to them about Europe and they were sort of saying, you know, we must get out, etc. I said: where do you sell your fish again? They said: Boulogne. I said: wow, now you’re going to give me a really hard job, aren’t you, as your member of parliament, because I’m going to have to negotiate with the mayor of Boulogne [so] that you can sell your fish in France. They said: I didn’t realize that. What, you mean we wouldn’t be able to sell our fish in France if we came out of the EU? I said: that is the implication. And we, as pro-Europeans, have not actually made that –

Nigel Farage:
That’s apocryphal, isn’t it?

Laura Sandys:
No, it’s not.
Nigel Farage:
There is no way – your fishermen know more about the real world than you do.

Laura Sandys:
No, they absolutely did not.

Nigel Farage:
They damn well know that a country like the United Kingdom, which is now the eurozone’s biggest export market in the world, with whom there is an annual trade deficit running at £50 billion a year, and given that only Belarus and the Ukraine (within the European time zone) haven’t got some kind of free trade deal with the European Union – they know that we’ll go buying –

Laura Sandys:
The idea that French fishermen are going to allow British fishermen to sell fish in Boulogne, I assure you, is quite an –

Nigel Farage:
Laura, I just don’t know what planet you’re on. Business goes on anywhere.

Laura Sandys:
No.

Sarah Montague:
Let’s leave the fishing there, so we can get through some more questions.

Question 2:
I want to go back to women, particularly on the elderly. Is it just white old men – there aren’t any white old women who have suffered a similar displacement - that are supporters of UKIP? That’s one of the points I wanted to make. The other one is basically that Nigel, as a political leader, seems to stand out. My 11-year-old son has recently done a project on political leaders and one of the
problems he had was he kept mixing up Nick Clegg and Ed Miliband and David Cameron. I hadn’t thought about it before, as someone who is immersed in politics, but they do seem to be quite similar and offering a similar message. So I presume that for voters who are not so well engaged in politics that it is difficult to distinguish between the three major parties, and this is also a factor in Nigel’s popularity.

Matthew Goodwin:
On the gender gap, it’s quite clear that not only UKIP but also other radical right-wing parties in Europe have this problem. There are various reasons as to why that is the case. One is, as Nigel has said, because of the statements of some of their candidates. But more than that, I think it’s slightly deeper in that generally women tend to be less attracted to parties that are seen as being heavily nationalist and also at times not seen as being a credible option at big, first-order elections.

But that brings me to your second point. One of the challenges facing UKIP – one is that institutional problem. We look at top seats for UKIP in 2015. The idea of UKIP representation in Westminster – it’s going to be very difficult for the party. It’s not completely beyond the realms of possibility, but it is going to be very difficult. How is the party going to navigate that first-past-the-post system, led by Nigel? But secondly, the second challenge – and I guess I refer this back to Nigel – is what happens after you stand down. Because so much of this seems to stand on your shoulders.

Nigel Farage:
I probably won’t stand down. I’ll probably get killed in some crash, as I’ve had several in my life so far. No, I mean look. I’ve never wanted UKIP to be a one-man band. I’m not some maniac egotist who has to do every TV interview – far from it. I’m very pleased we have got some new talent coming into the party. You’ll notice if you look at the airwaves over the last month or so, I’ve done very little. I’ve tried to bring new people on. I think the election of a whole raft of women with some very different backgrounds –

Sarah Montague:
Who would you point to? Who should we all be looking at?
Nigel Farage:
I think, for example, Diane James, who stood for us in the Eastleigh by-election, has become established as a figure, has appeared on the Today Programme or whatever. I think there are people like Margot Parker, who’s going to get elected for us in the East Midlands, who’s a steelworker’s daughter, a small businesswoman, [who has] actually done rather well in life. People like this who’ve got real life experiences, have run businesses, bring up families – actually they’re going to start to help us to reach a different but bigger audience.

Sarah Montague:
Can I just ask post-2017 – because it’s one thing post-Nigel Farage, but post-2017 (assuming there is a referendum) what happens to UKIP?

Nigel Farage:
That’s the key, isn’t it? We are going to be spending the bulk of our money in the next eight weeks in the big Midlands and northern cities, targeting the Labour vote. I think the Conservatives who are going to vote for UKIP, or even lend their vote to UKIP, on 22 May, who live in Dorset, have made their minds up already. I think it is in those big cities – we saw the polling earlier - if we’re to overhaul the Labour Party and win those European elections and strike a body blow to Miliband, in terms of his credibility as a winner, we’ll do it in the Midlands and northern cities. I think if we do that, then there’s every reason to think that Labour will match Cameron’s promise of a referendum. So I think to think there will be a referendum in 2017 because Cameron is going to get a majority next year looks pretty unlikely.

Sarah Montague:
But say you’re successful with that and there is a referendum. In a sense, whichever way it votes, what’s the point of UKIP afterwards?

Nigel Farage:
I think the fact that we’re actually picking up voters on issues that are not directly related to the constitutional question perhaps answers that question. If you look at the English county elections last year, people voted for us not on the European question but for all those local issues – everything from the
Laura Sandys:
I think certainly when you talk about the women's vote, I think the issue is the economy, it is health, it is education. I cannot articulate any UKIP strategies, any UKIP policies on those issues. And those are the top-line issues that will determine the general election, and we've got to be absolutely clear about it. But I think we also have to learn from UKIP, and that is, this is not just a transactional relationship. There has to be values that underpin each of the main political parties that are articulated effectively and actually engage the public, in a way that is believable and long term.

Question 3:
It's interesting to me that the Euro-sceptic vote seems to come from the right, where you see in Scandinavia the Euro-sceptic definitely emanates from the left. So the idea that suddenly you get people on the left voting for UKIP is no surprise to anybody who is used to Scandinavia. That is the common thing there and I would expect it to continue, but would like your comments on that.

The second thing is – I know I am old, I am white and I'm male, but I also do feel left behind in this whole European issue, because the vast majority of the political decisions are taken amongst 450 million people speaking 15 different languages and by a president who I can't understand. I don't understand his language and I would expect that the British public, if you asked them, less than 1 per cent would be able to tell you his name. So the idea that you are feeling left behind is not just the people that feel that the economic crisis has hit them. It is actually people who would like to have an influence on what happens politically in this country.

Matthew Goodwin:
That's exactly what core UKIP voters are saying, when we surveyed them, that 'people like me have no say in government'. When you look at the stats, that's certainly something we need to think about. In Parliament today, only 4 per cent of MPs have experience of manual work. That's down from 16 per cent in the time of Thatcher. They were never a majority but they are almost an extinct species now. These are big challenges for representativeness. Rob and I have written something over the last couple of days on the selection of
Stephen Kinnock within the Labour Party as an example of that – somebody who is flown into a safe Labour seat who has very little connection with local voters, who spends his time between Geneva and the World Economic Forum and Brussels.

These are big questions for the left, and that relates to your first question. How are centre-left governments – not only in Britain, but centre-left parties – going to deal with these radical right revolts? Because their appeal is strongest not among right-wing voters; their appeal is strongest among centre-left, blue-collar workers who are already instinctively Eurosceptic and hostile to immigration and anxious and insecure. I think a big reason why that is the case is because the centre-left, for obvious reasons, is still very reluctant to open up a conversation with those voters about values and identity and community. Instead it structures its narrative far too much along the lines of economics and finance. These voters want to have a much deeper conversation than that. Really difficult for the left.

**Sarah Montague:**
I wonder, Nigel Farage, when you’re described as radical right, are you quite happy with that tag?

**Nigel Farage:**
We’re radical all right. We are so extreme, Sarah – and this may shock, particularly Laura will be very shocked by this concept – we actually don’t want to be governed by Herman Van Rompuy and 28 unelected bureaucrats in Brussels. We want Britain to be a self-governing, independent nation, proud of who it is and where voters are connected directly to the destiny of our country. I have never regarded – I left business 20 years ago to get involved in this and I have never regarded our agenda as being radical or extreme. Just plain common sense.

**Sarah Montague:**
Okay, but I interviewed somebody from the Front National in France the other day –

**Nigel Farage:**
I’m not interested.
Sarah Montague:
Well, everybody else might be interested, so I’m going to ask the question.

Nigel Farage:
It’s classic BBC isn’t it, you try to link me with the Front National.

Sarah Montague:
No, I’m not. But he linked himself with you.

Nigel Farage:
I couldn’t give a damn. I’m not interested. I heard the man in question. His name is Bruno Gollnisch. He’ll tell you within the first five minutes of meeting him that Auschwitz is all a complete fabrication. I am not doing business with the Front National in any way at all, period. That’s it.

Sarah Montague:
Okay. Will you do business with those on the left in Scandinavia?

Nigel Farage:
Of course, and I have done in the past. I’ve sat in the European Parliament with Danish left-wing groups before, absolutely.

Question 4:
It’s a similar question, but I would be more interested in whether you feel that your voters or people who are considering voting UKIP have anything in common with the people that voted for FN [Front National]. So not whether you would do business with them but whether your voters have similar concerns, and what you feel about that, because that is quite a key issue.

Nigel Farage:
Well, I’m not standing in France. I had thought about it, but I’m not.
Sarah Montague:
But it’s interesting – you cleared out your candidates, do you want to clear out some of your voters?

Nigel Farage:
Well, the point is this. For some years – by the way, this book deals with this question beautifully. There is a chapter in there about what happened within UKIP in 2008 in terms of the direction that the party very consciously chose to take. I even changed the constitution of the party, so we’re the only UK political party now where if you’re ex-BNP – in fact the Tories have got an ex-BNP guy standing for them in a by-election in Lincolnshire later on this month. We wouldn’t allow that. So I’ve absolutely made it clear we want no truck with the BNP types at all.

But your question – I think you meant BNP voters, not FN voters. What we did, starting with the Alden by-election in the north of England, is for the first time ever try and deal with the BNP question by going out and saying to BNP voters: if you’re voting BNP because you’re frustrated, upset with the change in your community- but you’re doing it holding your nose because you don’t agree with their racist agenda, come and vote for us. I would think that we’ve probably taken a third of the BNP’s vote directly from them. I don’t think anyone has done more, apart from Nick Griffin on Question Time, but I don’t think anyone has done more to damage the BNP than UKIP and I’m quite proud of that.

Question 5:
Right now, how relevant is the EU question to the majority of British people who are struggling to make ends meet on a daily basis? And, what does UKIP have to offer, apart from massaging the egos of proud English men, playing on their nostalgic emotions and insecurities?

Joe Twyman:
If you ask people what’s the most important issue facing the country, and you give them a list of options and you ask them to pick their top three, around about one in seven people chooses to mention Europe. Among UKIP supporters that is slightly higher but it’s by no means overwhelming. Then when you expand the question and say: what’s the most important issue
facing you and your family? Then about one in thirteen people says it. So it’s just not a big issue. It’s not a big thing for people. Even in the run-up to European elections, it never really suddenly skyrockets. Instead, what’s more important to people are the issues that have been discussed, and particularly for UKIP supporters it’s things like welfare, things like benefits, and it’s things like immigration.

**Sarah Montague:**

One other thought. Sunder Katwala, I think, has got something coming out with British Future – he makes the point that actually UKIP is doing fabulously but wait until the general election: that vote will disappear. What’s the evidence when you look back?

**Matthew Goodwin:**

I’ll just come in on that, because that is the ultimate test for UKIP: how do you get over the first-past-the-post system? The Conservatives have latched onto this narrative that we’ll take a hit at the European Parliament elections and then we will come out gunning with Vote UKIP – Get a Labour Government. The sort of objectives behind that are relatively clear, to in essence frighten UKIP voters back into the Conservative camp.

There are two problems with that from a party strategy perspective. One is, obviously, not all UKIP voters are Conservatives. Many of the people who we polled would simply not go back to the Conservatives or might not even go back to any party in Westminster, so that’s a big problem. But secondly, Lord Ashcroft’s polling this week showed quite convincingly that only one out of every ten UKIP voters would both believe that narrative and let it influence their vote choice.

So as we go into 2015, there really is [are] a lot of unknowns about where these UKIP voters are going to go; how you could bring them back into the fold of mainstream politics; whether they are so dissatisfied they are just going to go out anyway and say: ‘to hell with the institutional context, I’m going to vote expressively’. So lots of open questions because we’ve never been here since the 1980s with the SDP [Social Democratic Party].

**Joe Twyman:**

Historically, it has always fallen back, but it’s never been historically this high.
Nigel Farage:
I think we get this wrong, you see. It's interesting, all the panel saying Europe doesn't really matter to people. But if you ask people: what matters to you – getting a job or Article 127 of the Treaty on European Union? You may find jobs are more popular. But, of course, what nobody understands in Westminster or amongst the commentariat is the penny has dropped. The great British public now know that wage compression and youth unemployment are directly linked to the wholly irresponsible, stupid policy of having an unconditional open door to 485 million people.

Laura Sandys:
I think we've got to look at the European issue as something that, as I say, is euphemistically for being out of control, not feeling that you've got the hands-on political leaders – I mean, I'm not disagreeing in many ways, but the issue of how to address this, particularly when you start to talk about migration, actually the policies that are in place, are dealing with migration, are actually nothing to do with numbers in, numbers out. It's to do with welfare reform, which actually is moving people back into work, and secondly is education. We've been let down quite significantly on our skills and our educational achievement, and that has created skills gaps. This is not a short-term thing. I would love to find out what the world looks like if we come out of the EU and we get rid of every single migrant out of this country. It is not going to solve the problem.

Nigel Farage:
Who's suggesting we do that?

Sarah Montague:
But what are you suggesting?

Nigel Farage:
I'm suggesting we have an honest conversation with the British public. I thought Nick Clegg was a supporter of the EU; I found him in denial last week, as I find Laura in denial. Let's have a conversation with the British people. Do we have an open door to 485 million people or not?
Sarah Montague:
Nigel Farage’s Britain would be what – one where people cannot come here to work unless they have – you would impose a sort of points quota?

Nigel Farage:
A work permit system, and I wouldn’t discriminate in favour of Romania against India. No, I think we need to have not just a control on quantity but also a control on quality.

Sarah Montague:
If British people overseas had to take a hit as a result of that, is that a problem?

Nigel Farage:
But why would they? That’s a ridiculous assertion, isn’t it? We get all this nonsense that comes out about the number of Brits that are in Europe. Actually there are fewer than 400,000 British people working in Europe. If you deal with the expansionist phase post-2004, there are only 42,000 Britons working in the A8 countries. We can have a sensible reciprocal system but to have an open door – and the big risk, Sarah, is this. The eurozone is in such desperate trouble that I think we’re on the edge of the biggest migratory wave yet.

Sarah Montague:
Okay. I’m conscious we could keep going but I think we’d better get some more questions.

Question 6:
I’m going to vote for Mr Farage and I’m not an old white man. The reason is very simple. I can sum it up in one line. It’s getting a bit crowded around here. When I came here to this country in the 1970s, we used to sing hymns about a green and pleasant land. That’s not going to happen if every decade we have to build houses for 2 million more people. Sorry, but I’m going to vote for him.
Laura Sandys:
What I’m fascinated about is how we get to a situation where we stop the migration and we start to – we’re not going to be reducing numbers, because numbers will go up on the basis of our existing population. On one hand, Nigel wants us to stop our open borders with Europe and start trading with the rest of the world – which is a fantastic objective, to trade with the rest of the world. Why is it that we don’t want both? Why is it that we don’t want to be ambitious with our trade globally, as well as with the EU?

Sarah Montague:
Why can’t we have both in Nigel’s world?

Laura Sandys:
Because the point with it is that we’re going to end up a bit like Norway, ending up having our regulations faxed to us. We’re not going to have our voice, our businesses’ voice round the table.

Sarah Montague:
Loss of control.

Nigel Farage:
Oh Norway, that would be dreadful. Wouldn’t it be dreadful? I could live with that.

Sarah Montague:
Hold on a second – but Norway complains about loss of control.

Nigel Farage:
No - Norwegian politicians. Don’t forget, this argument of people versus the political class is going on today in Switzerland and in Norway as well.
**Laura Sandys:**
Why do you want to trade power in Europe with power in the rest of the world? Why don’t you want it all? I want both because I’m a bit greedier for Britain than you.

**Nigel Farage:**
Because I want Britain to have a global voice. To think that when the World Trade Organization meets to discuss global trade that British representatives are shown the door and we’re banned from even being in the room, shows you we’re losing global influence and not gaining it.

**Laura Sandys:**
Not at all.

**Question 7:**
Nigel Farage, in his opening address, mentioned the disparity of wealth across Europe as one of the tenets of his thinking. If UKIP gets its way, what is next? As we’ve seen the changing shape of Britain over the last centuries, what are your thoughts on the disparity of wealth in the UK? This isn't just a Scottish question, I mean across England as well.

**Nigel Farage:**
I think in a sense this links to what this book is all about. It is that growing gap between the aspirations of the wealthy and the realities of the poorer that in many ways has created the environment that has allowed UKIP to flourish. Let’s face it: the seven per cent of people who go to the private/public schools (call them what you will) are now dominating our national life in a way we’ve never seen before. We see it, not just in politics, not just in the media, not just in the arts. We even see over half our Olympic gold medal winners went to that seven per cent of schools. We’ve seen the opportunities for those lower down the social spectrum – frankly, they have sunk lower and lower. Laura mentioned education, and I agree totally, we have got a failing education system for too many of our young people. So I think that’s where UKIP actually appeals to the aspirational blue-collar voter, by saying things like the opportunity for a grammar school education should be afforded to everybody.
Sarah Montague:
You seem to recognize in large part it is the ‘left behind’ that you are – I use the word ‘protest vote’, and I know you won’t like it, but people are unhappy with everything. You put it down to disenchantment. Are you, in terms of running your party, somewhat concerned about how you keep all these people with you over years?

Nigel Farage:
I’m very concerned, of course I am. Keeping any political party together is difficult because you’ve always got different support bases that come from different wings. But I think the protest vote thing is very interesting. The first time I really heard this was the morning after the Eastleigh by-election, on your programme: ‘a big protest vote for UKIP’. I went down the high street in Eastleigh and people came up to me and said: ‘Mr Farage, we’re not protest voters – we haven’t voted for 20 years. We voted for you yesterday because you actually stand for the values that we believe in’. So I think it’s very interesting. Over one in five of our votes come from people who would be deemed to be non-voters. Almost by definition, that can’t be a protest.

Sarah Montague:
Do you reckon UKIP is going to be around in ten years’ time as a strong force? What’s your call, each of you, on this?

Matthew Goodwin:
If it is, Rob and I can come back and write another book and explain why it is. Even if UKIP isn’t, the point behind this debate is that the divisions we’re picking up, the divisions that have opened up and grown since the crisis are going to be with us. In one form or another, we will have this struggling, disadvantaged, low-educated, low-skilled group of voters who feel completely cut out of our political conversation and disconnected from mainstream life. Where are they going to go? Are they going to stay home, give up on democratic politics altogether? Or are they going to stay loyal to a party like UKIP or a successor? The key question facing those in politics is: what do you do about those divisions within our society that are also within every other West European democracy, which is why we’re seeing very similar trends in terms of party competition. That is where the real question, the real debate is, I think.
Joe Twyman:
I think it depends on what you mean by strong. Will they have seats in Westminster? I’d be very surprised. Will they have a bump around the European elections? Yes.

Sarah Montague:
You would be very surprised if they had any seats in Westminster?

Joe Twyman:
Yes. I don’t think, for reasons that have been discussed. But I also don’t think Britain will vote to leave Europe and so I think there will always be a place for Nigel and his party.

Nigel Farage:
There will always be an England.

Laura Sandys:
I think really we’re also at a particular moment, a high point, where we’ve got economic shocks; people are concerned about their future. One of the other problems that we have is total lack of social mobility. That is something that has to be – there has to be opportunity, optimism and an endgame that actually offers people the opportunity to move on and up and all the rest of it. We’ve lost that. That’s something that hopefully education, the economy recovering, will actually start to dilute some of this much more visceral and emotional –

Sarah Montague:
You’re suggesting it will chip away at UKIP support?

Laura Sandys:
I think so.
Sarah Montague:
Okay, how many MPs are you going to have in ten years' time?

Nigel Farage:
I actually think that in most things in life, the factor that nobody ever thinks about is luck. It’s luck. The Reform Party of Canada went all through the 1980s doing well in local government, not getting near a seat in Ottawa, being written off by the established media as being right-wing, radical, extreme, god knows what. As luck would have it, there was a by-election one day way out west and despite the fact that they’d scored three per cent there just a few months before in the general election, a local schoolteacher stood and she won the by-election. Nobody could believe it. She went as a sole Member of Parliament to Ottawa, and in the next general election they were the biggest party in Canadian politics.

Sarah Montague:
Okay. So was Robert Kilroy-Silk just unlucky?

Nigel Farage:
No. No, definitely not unlucky. I could use a different set of words about him but I’m not going to.

Sarah Montague:
So how many MPs?

Nigel Farage:
I have no idea. I haven’t got a clue.

Sarah Montague:
It’s going to be hard to get one, isn’t it?
**Nigel Farage:**

As I said to you, it's about luck. The Eastleigh by-election came along and we came up on the rails as a very fast horse and almost overtook the Lib Dems. As [Paddy] Ashdown said, another week longer, UKIP would have won it. Let's wait and see. I've no idea.

**Sarah Montague:**

Ladies and gentlemen, Nigel Farage, Laura Sandys, Joe Twyman and Dr Matthew Goodwin. The book is available, I'm sure you'll see it somewhere on your way out, if you want to buy it.