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**A second EU referendum, without a significant shift in the polls,
would put British democracy at risk, says Robert Peston.**

We will be “playing with fire when it comes to the cohesion of our society” if there is a second Brexit Referendum “in the absence of a considerable shift in public opinion,” according to ITV’s Political Editor Robert Peston. The journalist and presenter was talking about his new book, *WTF?*, at a sold-out event today at the Edinburgh International Book Festival.

“I am not saying it is wrong to have another Referendum [about Brexit] and I think there are certain circumstances in which it would be almost impossible to prevent another vote,” he said. “If, in the end, we don’t get a negotiated deal and are looking at the chaos of exiting without a deal, in those circumstances, vast numbers of Leavers would say: ‘This is not what we signed up for’—and it would be almost impossible for any government to refuse to go back to the people in those circumstances.

“This was the biggest exercise in direct democracy in our history,” he reminded his audience. “Record numbers of people voted. Yes, we don’t think the campaign was conducted strictly fairly—actually there was some dodginess on both sides, but there seemed to be more dodginess on the Leave side. But can we be certain that there would have been a different outcome if they’d been slightly less dodgy? I don’t think you can, with confidence.

“We are playing with fire when it comes to the cohesion of our society, when it comes to the solidity of what we regard as the pillars of our society, if – in the absence of a considerable shift in public opinion, we simply said that we don’t like the outcome, so let’s have another [referendum].”

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Peston spent much of the event outlining what he thought were the main reasons behind the Brexit Referendum result and the election of President Donald, two events which he knew would have shocked his late economist father. These included worsening inequality, falling living standards and a rise in social media that, while undermining the political influence of press moguls and editors, has also completely changed the way political battles are fought.

“This is a book about explaining why people behaved or voted in ways that many of us, from a particular tradition, would have thought of as irrational—and an attempt to explain why it was not irrational.” Robert Peston said.

In response to an audience question about the apparent lack of pro-EU rhetoric from the Labour Party, Peston admitted. “Firstly, Jeremy Corbyn is a Eurosceptic; he’s just not a champion, in any shape or form, of the European Union. The second thing is there are a lot of Labour voters and erstwhile Labour voters who became Leavers, and they are worried about alienating those voters in their heartlands. But also, this is a party which, at the top, seems more fixated with ideological purity rather than what will get them into power.”

The consequences of this are clear. Given the succession of “catastrophes” experienced by Theresa May’s government in recent months, Peston suggested that you’d expect the Opposition party “to be 20 points ahead”. Labour is currently neck and neck.

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