

The return of two party politics?

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The Conservatives won Newark. That should be no surprise: this was its 44th safest seat and the fact that Labour has won it in living memory does not change that.

But that was not really the story, as everyone knows. The story was that UKIP came second, Labour third and the LibDems sixth.

Now, taking any message from by-elections is hard. Some will note that this is the first Tory by-election win when in government since 1989, but I wouldn't: that's desperation stakes time.

What interests me more is the potential evidence of two strong trends. One is that women did not vote for UKIP. About 36% of men did but only 16% of women. That is a seismic difference which suggest it cannot possibly get near power in this country.

Second, is the apparent rise of tactical voting to keep UKIP out. That may have explained the collapse in LibDem votes. It may have explained the lacklustre Labour campaign: better by far, I am sure it thought, a predictable Conservative win than a UKIP victory. I think a good few held their noses and voted Tory to achieve that goal. I can see why.

But in that case this might herald something we had not expected, and that is a return to two party politics. If people desert the LibDems very widely and coalesce around what is perceived to be the lead party with a chance of keeping UKIP out (which only occasionally is LibDem) does this mean that we will actually see more seats going to the two lead parties and that, far from breaking the mould, revulsion at UKIP may reinforce it?

That is an intriguing possibility but also worrying if that reinforces the neoliberal consensus that currently dominates politics by giving little hope of a break though of new thinking to challenge that hegemony.

We need political change in this country to ensure the majority get the chance they need by giving them access to the human and financial capital that is essential for their

success. We do not need a politics based on fear to achieve that: this is, I am sure, why UKIP does not work for women. But equally we do not need the status quo either and perversely that may be exactly what UKIP might deliver.