

All elections should be about freedom from fear

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I spent last night discussing the election. Who with and where does not matter.

What I argued (amongst other things) was something I have said many times before. This is that contrary to perceived wisdom elections do not really come down to the economy, but to something much more primal than that, which is freedom from fear.

What people want most from politicians is not the promise of economic nirvana, because they know that won't be delivered (whatever is said). What they want instead is a deep seated sense of security.

They want a home, and a chance to build a place in a community.

They want an education for their children which delivers the skills they need and the chance of equipping them for life. They don't want that disrupted by having to move.

They want security nationally, of course, but much more importantly they want security at the local level. This is not just physical security for them and their property; it is the protection of their right to be the person they are.

They want work. Most do not have unreasonable expectations as to pay or conditions, but equally they hate the idea of being exploited.

They want to know when things go wrong they won't face ruin, whether that be because of ill health or economic or social misfortune for them or their family.

They need to know that if they live to an old age it will be in dignity.

And they want to be able to pass a better world, and a sustainable world, to their children.

These issues are what people worry about. It is why they lie awake at night. They are the things that they know they cannot always control. And so it is what they want politicians to deliver for them for precisely that reason. It is this fear that creates the

fundamental dividing line between private and public concern, between necessary personal control of individual destiny and the appropriateness of state action.

Politicians have forgotten these facts, by and large. There is good reason. Most politicians are more immune from these fears than the average person. They have greater security than most so these issues do not seem as important to them as they are to most other people. That is why politicians prioritise economic narratives of choice when they should realise that most people know these choices are either not available to them or do not address their real issues of concern. That is precisely why so many people say politicians don't understand them.

And what is absurd is that all these most basic and important of things that I have noted could be made available to all but politicians don't deliver them because they have forgotten that without that freedom from fear for everyone none of us can eventually prosper.

Worse, because some politicians are so remote from the reality of these issues they actually set out to increase these fears in the belief that this provides some sort of perverse incentive for change.

It's my belief that it is delivery of this most basic freedom - the right to sleep at night - that defines the proper role of the state, and of those who put themselves forward for public office. The state and its politicians must deliver this sense of security above all else.

It's also my belief that if only that was understood and communicated then the re-engagement with politics that Scotland is seeing might spread more widely.

But that does require Westminster to see beyond its bubble. And it does require a political narrative far removed from that dictated by wealth and the issues it prioritises.

It means going back to fundamentals. But is there anything more important than offering the people of this country the security they need to live lives where they can feel confident that they can cope? If that's not a vision big enough to inspire politics, what is?