

The shape of politics

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It will come as no surprise to anyone that I think about the shape of politics. In a democracy I suspect that this should look something like this (don't worry too much about the absolutely precise shapes, these are Sunday morning doodles):

The X scale is from left to right: there is a mid point and that should broadly speaking be the most popular point, representing consensus.

Many people of my age would agree that in the last thirty years this mid point has shifted right (orange line, blue as before):

What was once the mid-point is now to the left of the consensus (you can argue whether I should re-position the vertical Y axis blue line: I have chosen not to or I could not make the point)

Something else has happened of late though. There is less agreement about the consensus. It has been suggested that the centre ground is having less appeal. Whether the cause is austerity or immigration the range of opinion has flattened: the consensus is harder to identify amongst a broader range of opinion (green line, orange as before):

I do not think that the only change though. The public may have broadened their range of opinion but amongst political activists the tendency to the mean has disappeared (red line, green as before):

The public (green line) may have broadened their views, but political activists (the red

line) have abandoned the mean. On the left there has been a rise in left wing support, but with a marked group tending to the mean still existing in Labour, the Lib Dems and others. On the right the tendency to the old mean is in short supply, and the shift to extremes with the Conservatives and UKIP much more marked, evidenced by mass enthusiasm for Brexit.

I suggest a distribution, based on logic. Others will have a differing logic. The question is which of these trends is likely to prevail in the long term, given the tendency of human behaviour to converge on a mean? If I am right it would seem the left have greater prospect of emerging as the cause most likely to benefit in the long term: their overall message is closer to a past mean than the message of the right, and in aggregate more so now.

I suspect the political right are aware of this. It explains their enthusiasm for fundamental reforms to the NHS, education, trade, the EU, freedom of speech and politics itself. What they are seeking to embed is something against which they would expect a natural backlash in the normal course of events.

Out of power the left has to work out how to challenge that process and then reverse it if the shape of politics is not to be permanently changed by the contractual constraints being imposed upon it.

That's the current shape of politics. And the consequences have enormous impact.