

# North Shropshire does not mark the end for the Tories, ...

Published: January 13, 2026, 11:24 pm

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I doubt it is necessary for me to go through the statistics on the North Shropshire by-election result. Suffice to say that the Liberal Democrats came from third with 10% of the vote to come first with 47% whilst the Tories lost half their vote to register just 31% support.

This is a massive swing by any standard. It is worth noting some of the oddities of this.

This was a leave seat. That is quite unlike Chesham.

For a by-election the turnout was high, and much higher than the recent Bexley by-election.

The Labour vote collapsed. It is very apparent that the Tories did not just lose votes, but that Labour voters were willing to vote tactically.

ABC - Anything But Conservative - worked here.

This by-election was unnecessary. It was the result of Tory errors in parliament.

It is 200 years since this seat returned anyone got a Tory.

This result will have hordes of Tory MPs looking very nervously at their chances of electoral survival.

But, apart from the newsworthiness of this, what does it mean?

First, and most worryingly, it means that it will be much harder for Johnson to impose Covid restrictions when they are desperately needed. The far-right group in parliament probably gain short term advantage from this because he knows that they could now trigger a leadership election whenever they like.

Second, what that probably means is that they will not trigger that election, as yet. It suits them to have a PM they can manipulate in office rather than one enjoying

honeymoon popularity who might be able to ignore them.

Third, this uneasy truce might persist for a while. However, I suspect that there was something more to this voter rebellion than a reaction to Johnson's indifference to parties being held in No. 10. Decent people were not just offended by that behaviour. They were also profoundly disturbed by the thinking implicit in that tolerance. They reject both the lunacy of the right and the callous indifference to others that it represents. I think both the size of the vote and the scale of the swing suggest that.

Fourth, the Tory hard core is 31%. Staggeringly, people still voted for them despite the fact that the Tories have killed tens of thousands of people as a result of their ineptitude. It is hard to see what might change the views of those who still think this acceptable.

Fifth, there are many fewer votes on which Labour or any other party apart from the Tories might rely. Winning requires active cooperation in that case.

Sixth, I believe that winning a general election in the sense of getting rid of the Tories is possible in the light of this, but only with at least tacit cooperation taking place. In other words, the willingness to not campaign seen of late has to be not just tolerated but positively encouraged.

Seventh, the reason for this has to be made explicit by all opposition parties. The fight from now until the next election has to be about the fundamental issue of beating fascism. The Tories want to create an extreme, authoritarian state that oppresses those who live within it. That oppression is social, political and economic. It is all designed to further the interests of a few. A tacitly cooperative opposition has to work together to prevent that happening. That is now the primary job of all political parties in England and Wales. In Scotland the threat is already largely contained.

Eighth, this logic has not just got to underpin one election, but has to change the electoral system and even the nature of the country itself to ensure that the fascists cannot capture it in the way that the Tories have to date. That requires Labour to change its mind on PR, party funding and much more, but the actions of Unite in threatening to withdraw funding from it curiously makes that easier to imagine happening.

Ninth, this is the time for radical thinking across party boundaries. WW2 delivered Beveridge. The fight against Covid and to then transition the economy to sustainability demands the same new thinking.

Tenth, the time for materialist thinking that has dominated the left / right divide is over. The simple fact is that the divide in question was based on a fight to control the means of production that we now know must be held in trust by us for generations to come. That is where the debate that beats fascism has to be headed. Old thinking has to be

consigned to history, where it belongs.

I am hopeful this morning. But there is a great deal to do to cement this win and stop fascism in this country. I have to believe that is possible. This morning I do.