

# This has been a dismal election campaign for tax

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Is it too soon for an election campaign retrospective? I don't think so. In that case this is my first.

This campaign has been dominated by dismal discussions on tax and who might, or might not, charge less of it and on what.

I describe the debate as dismal for three reasons.

First, almost all of this discussion has been negatively framed. Tax has been treated as something that the listener to the politician would, if they followed the politician's logic, believe was charged by governments as if for fun. The possibility that tax might be necessary to cancel the inflationary impact of government suspending, or as a component in fiscal policy, or to address either inequality or market failure, or both, would seem to be entirely unknown to those politicians. I would like to think that is not the case, but this dismal campaign has persuaded me that almost no politician does understand tax.

Second, even though the issues of government spending and tax are only indirectly related, you would have believed there was no relationship at all based on what has been said. There has been an almost total refusal to discuss anything about public services during this campaign, precisely because most (not all) parties have been so determined not to mention the possibility of any additional tax charge that enhanced public services might both require and also fund, because that's the way these things work.

Third, the possibility that tax might deliver the social justice people in this country so obviously crave was ignored by almost all politicians and commentators.

The net result is that the most powerful instrument available to any government to shape the society we live in, apart from money creation itself, was ignored in debate except to the extent that this power should be limited to the greatest possible degree so that as little change as possible might be effected for the benefit of people in the UK.

I do not believe that is the debate that the people of this country wanted.

I think that was the debate the neoliberal media and its chosen politicians desired.

Can we change that by next time? It's got to be worth a try. We have to do better than this dismal performance.