

Could the two-party, Labour and Tory-dominated, politic...

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Labour's been knocked for six. The Tories face oblivion. And Reform are threatening politics as we know it. Did Thursday represent a political earthquake?

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9mEZofx3Na4?si=u1SoOWFfg2PkkcmF>

This is the audio version:

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This is the transcript:

Labour's been knocked for six by Reform. But if that's true, then the Tories have been almost wiped out by them.

That's the message from an extraordinary round of parliamentary by-elections, mayoralty elections and council elections, all of them in England, I stress, on Thursday.

We don't know the full results at the time this video's being recorded, and you will by the time it is broadcast, so you will have the upper hand with the precise details.

But what we know already is that in the Runcorn and Helsby by-election, Reform won by six votes. They beat Labour by having 38.72% of the vote, whereas Labour had

38.7% of the vote. That is the tiniest margin that you can imagine.

But what is really significant is this. In 2024, just last July, Labour got 52.9% of the vote, and Reform got just 18.1% of the vote. In other words, Reform is up 20%, Labour is down 14%, and the Tories are down 9%.

The Tories are being wiped out by Reform. Their support is just vapourising and disappearing in the direction of Nigel Farage's party, but Labour is being hit incredibly hard as well. This is one of the messages of the night.

It's happened in Lincolnshire, where we've seen a Reform mayor win by a significant margin.

It's also rumoured that the county council in Lincolnshire will have a Reform majority, and in Staffordshire, it's expected that the 53 Tory councillors who were in office on Thursday morning might all lose their seats. And there are only 60 councillors in Staffordshire as a whole. Reform might literally take out every Tory.

So far, the voting at the time that we're recording is 38% for Reform, 28% for the Tories, and 18% for Labour. Now, that is no indication of any form of national swing, because all the seats that were being contested were very largely in previous Tory strongholds. In other words, Labour really didn't have much to lose in most cases, except that parliamentary by-election. But what we are seeing is a significant swing.

And so let's just run through what this might mean if we actually extrapolate these results and consider what the political consequences are for the rest of this Parliament and beyond that.

The first is that the Tory party looks as though it could be heading for extinction. Now this is quite extraordinary. The Tory party has been able to claim, with good reason, that it has been the most successful political party in the history of democratic politics, going back more than 250 years in various forms, but nonetheless, a consistent presence in the UK House of Commons in a way that is unrivalled. And now it is polling so badly that nobody knows that it has a future.

I doubt that Kemi Badenoch, its current leader, has a future, so badly has she led it since the time that she took office. But that's not really the point. If the Tories now choose another leader, they will be even further to the right than Badenoch, and the likelihood that they will seek a merger with Reform is high. This party could be heading for extinction. The two-party system is, therefore, in a very real sense, heading for the most massive reform that we have seen for a century, and let's not pretend otherwise. This does change the whole dynamic of UK politics.

Secondly, Labour is not doing well. Now, nobody expected that it would, as I've been saying for a long time. Frankly, Labour has been utterly incompetent since it came into

office last July. It could not have done worse with the job of managing government than it actually has, and as a consequence, voters have rumbled it and they will not provide it with the support that it wants. That was seen in Runcorn where the poll, as I've already noted, fell dramatically. But it's true across the board. They've held these mayoralities in places like Doncaster and the West of England, but with substantially reduced votes.

And everywhere they're suffering the problem that Labour is trying to outdo the right-wing, in the form of Nigel Farage, by moving substantially in its direction. They can't, however, outdo the right from the right. That's not possible. Labour is meant to be, should be, was, and I hope one day might be again, a left-of-centre political party. And by that I mean a genuinely left-of-centre political party, but it is already at the centre right, and if it does badly at the moment, there's a very real risk that it will follow the Tories to the far right. We will, then, have nothing left in the rest of politics in the UK. Labour is making a catastrophic mistake by trying to pretend that it can become a right-wing party to beat Farage. That will not work.

Thirdly, the first-past-the-post electoral system had a terrible night on Thursday. Why? That's because if there had been proportional representation, we would not have seen Reform do nearly as well as it has.

Remember that at one time we had mayoral elections on the basis of single-transferable votes. That was the case in London for a long time, for example, but instead, we had first-past-the-post systems in operation this time, and so as a result, whoever got the largest pile of votes was elected. But suppose that Andrea Jenkins in Lincolnshire had, for example, been subject to a proportional representation system, although she won 42% of first preference votes, she may well have not won the overall election because people would never have given her a second choice, and therefore she might not have crept over the 50% which was required to win, and somebody else might have done.

And if the local council elections had been run on a proportional representation system, we might well have seen very significantly different results as well. Remember that proportional representation is used for local council elections in Scotland, but it is not in England, which is quite absurd. If many of those Reform candidates who have been successful in local council elections in England had been subject to a proportional representation vote, with voters being required to list an order of preference of candidates, many of those Reform candidates would not have met the threshold to be elected because people would not have given them their second choice. They would instead have swapped from the minority parties to a larger party opposing Reform, and as a consequence, the Reform candidates might well have lost, whereas at present they've won. So, first-past-the-post did a terrible job for democracy in the UK on Thursday night by returning candidates that most people quite actively do not want, and that is a travesty of justice.

Let's just mention those small parties, because this is my fourth point about these elections. They, by and large, had a bad night. The Greens had, for example, been hoping to have a good night in the West of England mayoral elections, because they had won Bristol Council, but they didn't. They came third, and that is because it seems very likely that many of their supporters switched their allegiance to Labour to hold Reform at bay. I think that is entirely possible, but this is just another consequence of that failure of the first-past-the-post electoral system. People should be able to vote for the party they want, with the hope that it will be represented and not have to endure a party that they don't want because the system requires them to vote with a peg on their nose. This is not democracy as it should be.

Fifth and most obviously, one of the things to note is that the turnout in these elections was really low. And frankly, those who did vote did not, in many cases, vote for Reform, as such, because a great many of them are completely unable to explain what its policies are beyond migration, but did instead vote as a protest against the mainstream political parties. Basically, there was a massive protest vote going on, and this is going to become a noisy feature of British elections for a long time to come unless and until we actually get electoral reform and voting can become a relevant political act again.

So people were out there saying, we don't want any of these candidates. In particular, they were sending that message to both the Tories and Labour. And I don't blame them. The Tories have proved themselves to be incompetent beyond any measure that we have previously known about. It is unsurprising that the party is being decimated. But Labour too are also being rejected by the voters, so soon after they were elected only in July 2024. They simply have not resonated since being in office with people, and things like abolishing the winter fuel allowance and keeping the two-child benefit cap in place, and alienating people by threatening austerity, and refusing decent pay rises for people who deserve it in the public sector, all those things have alienated key parts of their support, and the consequences is very clear. People won't vote for them. It's as simple and as straightforward as that.

Labour cannot win from where it is.

The Tories are probably over.

These parties have failed, and let's be blunt, it is neoliberalism that has failed them. Putting up sock puppets, people who have no opinion, nothing to say, who've only learned the party line, who can only repeat the maxims that have been handed down to them by head office, or report the latest text message that they've had on what they must say; those people will never endear themselves to an electorate. The electorate has rumbled that that is what they're being given. They realise that these people have no opinions of their own and no ability to deliver on their behalf because they're so out of touch with the reality of life, and the consequence is they won't vote for them.

I don't blame them, but this brings me to my final point when we look at last night, and

that is that unless we do actually reform our electoral system, this disenchantment with politics will become so significant that fascism will walk in as a consequence of the refusal of most people to vote for a party that will do nothing for the majority of people in this country.

We need electoral reform.

We need it to give Labour and the Tories a chance again, which is why it is now so bizarre that neither of them is in favour of it.

We need it to make sure that people have the right to proper representation of their opinion in Parliament.

We need it so that there is a chance for other political parties to come into the arena to make sure that there is a true spectrum of opinion represented on the ballot paper the next time that we see one.

We need it because without fair representation, we are not a democracy.

We are not a free country.

We are not properly governed, and we are headed for failure.

And that's where Reform will take us. Let's be clear, they have no idea why they've been elected.

They have no idea what policies they can implement.

There is no thing that they can do in the councils that they are going to take over which will actually support their supposed migration agenda, over which they have no control whatsoever. And there are no cuts that they can put in place that will not harm significant numbers of people who are already vulnerable.

Reform is the answer to no conceivable political question in UK politics. But when the Tories and Labour, and to a very large degree, the Liberal Democrats have no answers either, and the Green Party still remain out in the wilderness with regard to its economic policy, people are left devoid of political choice.

And in that case, they're not voting and they won't again until they are given a voting system that lets them express their opinion. That is the crisis that is facing the UK and its democracy, and its governance, and its very future. Without electoral reform, we're deluding ourselves and heading into a ghastly pit of neo-fascism and actual fascism, which is what Reform represents.