

How would I vote?

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I was challenged yesterday to explain how I would vote in forthcoming elections in Scotland for the Holyrood Parliament, in Wales for the Senedd, and in English local authority elections, assuming I was able to do so in all of them, when they are due in just a few weeks' time.

The answer is that I would do so differently in each case, because I think that democracy is a participative activity requiring careful thought to be expended on how a vote is cast, and therefore consistency is not a necessity.

In Scotland, I would vote for the SNP, although, as is obvious from comments I make both here and in The National, I have reservations about some of its economic policies, and even its approach to independence, both of which I think are far too timid to be of best benefit, overall, for the people of Scotland.

Why, in that case, would I compromise when using my constituency vote to support an SNP candidate? That is because there looks to be a prospect of the SNP getting a majority in the Holyrood Parliament, and I think that this is important to indicate the desire of the people of Scotland to leave the union with England. The symbolism of doing so matters, and this would override my concerns about SNP policy.

That said, in Scotland everyone has two votes in this election, the first being for a constituency candidate and the second being for a regional list, determined on a proportional representation basis. Since that list vote is designed not to favour a party likely to lead in the overall constituency vote, I think it would be wise to use that vote for a party other than the SNP. I would, then, vote for the Greens in Scotland in the regional list election.

Again, I am not completely sold on all Green policy in Scotland, but few people find total alignment between their views and that of any political party, and supporting another party that is pro-independence would, in this situation, count more for me. I would therefore cast my vote this way to maximise the chance of there being a significant majority of MSPs in favour of independence in the Scottish Parliament after this

election.

It is because of their support for the union in Scotland that I could not, if living in that country, vote for Labour, the Liberal Democrats, Reform, or any other pro-union party. There are clear red lines in Scotland around who I could vote for, and they are drawn on the basis of support for independence.

In the Welsh proportional representation system, the choice is easier. I have no doubt at all that I would lend my support to Plaid Cymru. They are well ahead in opinion polls. At a time when, for the first time in a century, Labour will not win a Welsh election of any form, I think they have the greatest ability to form a government suited to the needs of the people of Wales, and they are at present offering an agenda which is politically and economically sensible, whilst making it clear that they think that this period in power is one in which they should consolidate options that would lead to Welsh independence, rather than demand it. All of that suggests a pragmatic and sensible approach to government which would win my support, with that support being essential when it seems likely that Reform will be the second-largest party to be returned by this election, albeit with total votes cast in their favour being well behind those registered for Plaid Cymru.

Are there any other parties that I could consider in Wales, where the red line of support for independence is not as important as it is in Scotland? The only other party I would consider would be the Greens. I would dismiss Labour, the Conservatives, Reform, and Restore (if they were standing) for all the reasons I note below with regard to voting in England. I would also dismiss the option of voting for the Liberal Democrats, because they now have such a small presence in Wales that they have nothing to contribute to its politics anymore, and I therefore see them as irrelevant within this context.

So what am I going to do in England? Here, I will be exercising a different choice, and accept that the choice I would make will depend upon where I might be voting.

Firstly, there are some parties I could not vote for. Restore, Reform, and the Tories are high on that list. The first two are, in my opinion, neo-fascist and profoundly racist, and the third is not very far behind. In all three cases, their toxicity would never allow me to vote for them, even if there was no other choice on the ballot, in which case I would spoil my paper.

I should add that there is another party I could not support at this moment, although I have voted for it on occasion in the past, and that is Labour. So intensely neoliberal are they, and so indifferent are they to the well-being of the people of the UK as a whole, that they are governing in a fashion that is detrimental to many people's well-being, whilst creating a climate of fear for many who are economically and socially vulnerable within our society. I would now find it impossible to vote for the current Labour Party, whoever it was who might be standing for them, and I am aware that there are still some people within Labour whom I like and would still describe as friends. This is the

sad point to which this party has now descended.

Having noted these exclusions, I am only left with the choice between the Greens and the Liberal Democrats. I am amongst those who have, in the past, voted Liberal Democrat on the basis that it represented a vote for none of the other parties standing, and therefore was a protest rather than an act indicating support. Where, and if, I thought that such a vote might still achieve the goal of keeping out of office one of the four parties for whom I could not vote, previously listed, I still think that option is a possibility for this election, and this would take careful research and consideration.

However, I have to make clear that my preferred option in the selection would be to vote for the Greens. I have been committed to environmental causes, and green thinking, since the 1970s. I was a co-author of the original Green New Deal, and wrote most of the materials that the Green New Deal Group have published, although it is now functionally moribund, with most of its members now undertaking their activity elsewhere. I am, therefore, unsurprisingly delighted by the growth in support for the Green Party since Zack Polanski became its leader, and was pleased to join him on one of his first ever podcasts in the series that he has been putting out since taking on that role.

I think there is a good chance that the Greens might adopt an enlightened and refined approach to both economic and social policy in the UK over the next year or two as they begin to shape their electoral offering in advance of the next UK general election. Those who are standing for office for the Greens are, I think, dedicated to ideas with which I have sympathy, although I remain unsure as yet as to whether a sufficiently robust approach to Green Party management of local authorities does exist. What I am, in other words, implying is that I would be, yet again, voting with some reservations, which has, I think, been the case throughout my near 50-year voting record, but on this occasion with fewer than normal, which would be a pleasant surprise.

In summary, therefore, in England my overall inclination would be to vote Green, whilst retaining the option to vote Liberal Democrat as a protest vote if I thought doing so had the greatest prospect of keeping out of office a candidate representing one of the parties that I have listed, whose presence in local government I cannot think to be a benefit at present.

I stress when saying this, as should be clear, that my approach to elections is always nuanced, considered, and variable, in the sense that no party can consistently rely upon my support if they promote measures with which I am in disagreement. I am always, therefore, open to changing my mind, but in the face of all the uncertainties that voting in our current electoral systems impose (whilst noting that those in Wales and Scotland are significantly better than those in England), the choices that I have indicated are, I think, the best currently available, without necessarily implying that I endorse all the policies of the parties in question.

I hope that this helps provide a response to the challenge made to me.