

Will the UK survive?

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The local election results in England and national government elections in Wales and Scotland may prove to be among the most historically significant political events of modern times.

In this video, I argue that Britain's traditional two-party system is collapsing, nationalism is reshaping every nation within the UK, and the constitutional settlement holding the union together is now under unprecedented strain.

Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland are all now led by parties questioning rule from Westminster.

At the same time, England itself is deeply divided over its identity, as Reform keeps alive the divisions created by Brexit, raising further questions about its future direction.

The question now confronting the UK is, in that case, existential. What is the nation now for, and does it still represent a shared future for the four countries that make it up?

And might it be that each of those countries would now be better off on their own, pursuing a politics of care and the economics of hope, based on redistribution, inclusion, electoral reform, and rebuilding social solidarity within their own national frameworks?

[Please note that I apologise for the quality of the sound on this video: I had to record it as an audio-only version because of time pressure, and it turned out I did so in a slight echo chamber. It's OK, but we will learn from that.]

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7CB_hfRSKw0?si=KDmfC2S239G3Knt5

This is the audio version:

https://www.podbean.com/player-v2/?i=d2uf2-1abbd55-pb&from=pb6admin&share=1&download=1&rtl=0&font=Arial&skin=f6f6f6&font-color=auto&logo_link=episode_page&btn-skin=c73a3a

This is the transcript:

I think it is going to be very hard to, when we look back, overstate the significance of the elections that have happened across the UK this week. They have been, in every sense, historic for the changes in perception they create about the way in which the UK is governed, the way in which its political direction is moving, and the way in which the nation states that make up the UK even want to think about their futures. This is a seismic change in our political landscape, and we need to talk about that.

It would be incredibly easy to discuss these results in the context of short-term electoral positioning. It's obvious that, for example, the two-party electoral system in the UK that was dominated for a century by Labour and the Conservatives is now history. They are no longer winning popular support, and that is seen in their results. Labour and the Conservatives are both going to become residual parties at the next general election with no part to play in power. I cannot imagine either leading a government again in my lifetime, so great is the change that we are seeing, but that in itself is not enough to make this a historic event.

Nigel Farage did, and again, we need to note this, have a good night. But the deeper question is what the electorate in the UK now believes, and that is much more important than considering what any one political party has got to say at this moment about the results or where we might be going as a consequence.

These elections have revealed profound fractures within the UK, and I do mean deeply profound. These aren't just minor changes that we are seeing here. We are seeing seismic differences.

The UK now looks like a country falling apart. The constitutional settlement that has held it in place for centuries is no longer stable. Scotland is moving again towards the SNP. The idea that it might not now appears to be a blip, and Scotland is going to be governed by a pro-independence party yet again, its fifth in a row, and that indicates that Scotland is minded to leave the UK. When even Shetland, one of the strongholds holding out against the SNP, has now voted to send an SNP MSP to Holyrood, you know that something big is happening.

And that is also the case in Wales. Plaid Cymru is heading for a breakthrough result.

They look as though they might well lead the next government and administration in Wales. Labour is being consigned to history after a century of power in that country, and the consequence is that Scotland and Wales are now centring their debates about their political futures on the future of our union itself.

Add to this the fact that Northern Ireland now has a government headed by a party, Sinn Féin, that is itself committed to leaving the United Kingdom, and we are at a point in history which has never been reached before.

The fact is, we now have three of the four nations of the UK led by governments that are dedicated to ending their association with rule from London, and so by England. This is the historic nature of this moment. The fact is, we are going to be looking at something very different in the future, and it's all very well for England to pretend otherwise, but this is unsustainable, and anyone with any sense can see it.

There is another point to make as well, and that is that there is a nationalist instinct going on inside England at present alongside that seen in Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland. Reform is, after all, a UK nationalist party. I stress UK, I do not believe it wants to break up the union, although it has hinted that it might do so to try to win support in Scotland. I think that's a sham, and the fact is that UK independence is the basis of the appeal of Reform.

Let's not forget that Nigel Farage is on his third political party. The first was UKIP; the second was the Brexit Party, which succeeded in helping take us out of the European Union; and Reform is his third. That implies that the supporters of Reform are like the supporters of the SNP and Greens in Scotland, and Plaid Cymru in Wales, and Sinn Féin in Northern Ireland, also unsure about the future identity of the country of which they are a part. And this divide is very clear in this election.

You can look at there being a left-right divide, a wealth divide and other divisions which have driven the growth of Reform in some parts of England in particular, but not in others, but when you look at which parts of the country voted for Brexit, and which did not, you'll see the dividing line between those parts of the country that have now voted for Reform and those which have voted for Liberal Democrats or Greens as an alternative to the Conservatives and Labour.

So, what does this say? It says that England is no more settled as to its future than is Wales, or Scotland, or Northern Ireland. The fact is, this is also a country that is riven by division about what its identity really is. And as long as Nigel Farage remains in charge of Reform, and that is not a given because he has always walked away from the prospect of power before now, and I do not rule out that he will do so again, because this is a man terrified of power, terrified of accountability, and terrified of losing the income that would go with assuming responsibility, then there will be the chance that Reform will also seek to divide the UK, albeit on different lines to those which the national parties in Scotland, and Wales and Northern Ireland would seek to do.

We are, though, at this strange point where simultaneously, the two-party system and first-past-the-post democracy have clearly failed across the UK as a whole and particularly in England, but we have the problem that the whole of the United Kingdom is asking what is fundamentally an existential question. And that existential question is:

- * Who are we?
- * What do we want to be?
- * Where do we want to go?
- * Who do we want to go with?
- * Are we better together?
- * Will we be apart?
- * Will we be in the European Union or not?
- * Will we have the pound, the Euro, or some other currency of our own creation?
- * And a whole range of other issues as well.

The problem is, at this moment, there is no coherent vision of what happens next. The question is clearly on the table; the question has to be resolved. Is there a United Kingdom, or is there not? And is there a vision of what England is, or is there not? But no one seems to be able to answer that. We have no giant towering political figure who can answer this question in any meaningful way.

In Scotland, the SNP leadership has for a long time ducked the whole issue of independence and how they will develop a pathway to it and have instead said that they would use, for example, the pound as their currency, shackling them to England for an eternity as a consequence. And in Wales, Plaid Cymru has said, even if it does form the next administration in that country, it will not be talking about an independence referendum. This issue is not then on its current agenda, although it is on that of Sinn Fein, and let's be clear, that is where the first break is likely to happen because in Ireland as a whole, there is now evidence that maybe 60% of the population are looking forward to the existence of a unified Ireland within the European Union, and I think that would suit the majority in Northern Ireland now very well.

But in England, there is no answer to that question. Farage certainly can't answer it, and the Tories and Labour are left on the sidelines answering no question known to anyone. The fact is, this is a true existential crisis, and no one is addressing it.

So let me do so. I believe that each of these countries is able to stand on its own two feet. Each of them is able to be an independent country, either within or without the European Union, but I suspect that Ireland, Wales, and Scotland would all wish to be within, whilst not being in membership of the Euro, and anyway, they have to have

their own independent currencies before they can even consider becoming members of the Euro, so that question does not arise at present.

And I believe that each of them could deliver the politics that the people of those countries want, as I believe the Greens and others, if they so wished, could deliver the politics that the people of England want, most especially those who are now feeling extremely alienated and who are, as a consequence, lending their support to Reform as a result.

What is that politics? It is, of course, what I call the 'Politics of Care'; a politics that treats everyone as being important.

A politics that deliberately sets out to leave no one behind.

A politics that refuses to accept the fact that across the UK as a whole, right now, 14 million people, and maybe 4 million children, are living in poverty, which is utterly unacceptable.

A politics that would be based upon ensuring that no region would be left behind, and that services provided by the state would be sufficient for everyone to live a meaningful life where capabilities are fulfilled.

That is what a politics of care is all about. That is what each of these countries could set out to deliver.

It would demand sacrifices by some. In particular, there would have to be redistribution of income, wealth, and power, and the last is the one that nobody talks about, but is essential, which is why electoral reform has to be on the agenda, as well as those other issues.

And at that point, it would be possible to put in place policies that would negate the appeal of parties like Reform and would put in place, instead, the politics of care and the economics of hope that would deliver the type of unity which no other party is at present capable of delivering because they have not embraced these ideas.

There is then a possibility of creating a politics that can deliver the answer to the questions that each of these countries is now posing about their future and to their viability and to their potential unity around new themes of common identity, which would, as a consequence, heal the divisions within our societies.

That is what I'm looking for.

That is what I am hoping to achieve.

That is what the purpose of this channel is, and I believe that stressful as these election results are because of the divisions that they expose within our country, they do also

lay the foundations for change, and those foundations will become the basis for a better country, wherever you might live and wherever you have your aspirations, which aspirations will be fulfilled if we adopt a politics of care.

That's what I think. What do you think? There is, as usual, a poll down below. Please give us your vote. Please share this video if you like it. Please leave a comment, and please, if you are so inclined, give us a donation as well, because that helps this channel keep going.

Poll

[poll id="392"]