

Might Burnham call an election?

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I talk [in this morning's video](#) about the threats to democracy and the fact that voting is not the only indication that democracy is alive and well in a country.

That said, I have also noted growing speculation that Labour might hold an election before Christmas, with Kemi Badenoch, on behalf of the Tories, suggesting it is possible, and strong rumours that some close advisers to Andy Burnham think it might be advisable.

The suggestion is supported by growing rumours that John Healey is to present a stopgap Budget on 28 October this month, with full plans for a Burnham government to be revealed in a Budget in the spring of next year.

Will Burnham take this risk? Will he want to avoid the allegation that he is using Starmer's major majority for his own gain, without a mandate of his own?

I think that possibility is real and rests on two factors. One is the so-called Burnham bounce, which is, at present, seemingly bringing voters back from the Greens to Labour. The second is that Reform's popularity is currently on the wane, but Farage has a habit of bouncing back, so the opportunity has to be exploited. Burnham may be tempted to use these two situations to hold an election now.

What would happen if he did? Opinion polls are not certain as to their predictions, but what they agree on for sure is that Burnham would not win a majority if he were to hold an election soon. A range of current projections from YouGov, Electoral Calculus and More in Common all suggest that Labour would win around 250 or so seats. What is more interesting is what would happen to Reform, with Electoral Calculus putting them at under 100 seats and a More in Common MRP poll suggesting a much higher figure of close to 150. Their gains and losses appear to be at the cost of the Conservatives, whose forecasts vary widely from 120 to 160 seats, whilst Liberal Democrat forecasts appear to be fairly consistent at around their current 70-seat level, with the SNP recovering some of their losses in the 2024 election.

What would the outcome be then? At best, Burnham could look forward to a coalition with the Liberal Democrats. He might even need an alliance with the SNP as well to hold off a Tory/Reform alliance. No one is forecasting a significant role for the Greens at present.

The question is whether he might take that risk, seeking to replicate David Cameron's relatively stable government between 2010 and 2015 rather than face a greater loss in 2029, which would be almost inevitable given likely changes in the world economy in the meantime.

I think it is just possible that he might take this risk. The deciding factor might, however, be based on another aspect of Cameron's coalition government, which is that he then went on to win a general election outright.

There is something else to take into account. Cameron did not know why he wanted to be Prime Minister, and had very little policy, austerity apart, which was Osborne's idea. Burnham is another man without very many policy ideas, and his Cabinet, one or two exceptions apart, is made up of people who could not think themselves out of a paper bag. Might he therefore want a coalition to have a partner he can blame for inaction in the future? To me, that is the most compelling reason why he might now choose to go to the country. It's not a good one, but it is at least plausible.