

Another election where (most) politicians failed to lead or connect

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Did they all lose?

Elections are a wonderful way to tell us what we already know from opinion polls. Campaigns rarely shift the public perception, even during a referendum on a single issue. But these latest British votes seem to say something important, I think, about the continued failure of mainstream Westminster politics to communicate with the electorate.

Roughly speaking, the results for the local, devolved national and the AV referendum will, I reckon, be pretty much in line with the numbers from over a month ago. Of course, how they pan out in terms of seats and turn-out is still important. Likewise, the post-match arguments are as important as the campaigns in signalling the political response of the parties to their latest (un)popularity ratings.

It's also worth casting an eye across the increasing diversity of UK politics in the wake of these results. Scottish Labour has rightly acknowledged that it made a strategic mistake in failing to see how devolved power in action changed people's attitude to the SNP. Scots now trust the SNP to run things and would prefer a party more thoroughly disconnected from Westminster. Though I suspect the SNP may now over-reach themselves if they think this latest, historic result is a vote for further major constitutional change (yet).

Conversely, the Lib Dems have been slaughtered because they ARE in office. Suddenly, their supporters have decided that they don't trust them (or perhaps just Nick Clegg) with power.

Add to this mix the rejection of the AV reform and I think you get a salutary reminder of the continuing existence of the political disconnect between Westminster and the wider public.

The AV vote did not offer a real choice. The NO campaign was hysterical and misleading, but if the Yes campaign had had a decent case then they would have overcome the personal abuse and scare-mongering. In fact the public realised that they were not being offered anything like a significant reform. Certainly, it was not a change that would have had any significant impact on the inertia, corruption and irrelevance that the voters seem to think characterises Westminster party politics. The wonks obsessed about the marginal impact of voting systems and the latest attack poster while the public wondered how they were going to keep their job or pay their bills.

In the short term I think Nick should be very sad, David pretty chipper and Ed slightly concerned. The local election results suggest a return to two-party politics. That process will be helped, of course, by the retention of the First Past The Post voting system.

Steve Richards of The Independent was [wrong to suggest](#) that the Yes to AV vote would capture the imagination of a public angry at the current way of doing politics. But he was right to suggest that referendums have unexpected and explosive consequences. In this instance, it might just be the political petrol poured on the smouldering fire of Lib Dem local election defeat that blasts the coalition apart. The odds must now be shortening on an early election. In the end, however, I think the Lib Dems will cling to the keys of their ministerial limos for as long as they can. For Cameron, the Lib Dems are a wonderful human shield, so I'm not sure he wants to foist another poll upon the public.

I have [written before](#) about how coalition *might* help create a less frantic, more strategic kind of politics – or at least

political communications. Come back in 2014 and that might look a reasonable statement if the economy is recovering and the worst acts of 'structural readjustment' have been averted. But right now, coalition is only working for one party, and funnily enough, they are the party historically most opposed to sharing power.

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