

The battle over the leadership and values of the conservative movement

I read there is a debate amongst Conservative MPs over who to have as leader, which goes to the heart of what the Conservative Party should believe and advocate. There is also a debate over the leadership and structure of the Reform party with some wanting a democratic Party constitution to be introduced.

The One Nation group of Conservatives thinks they lost because they did not move sufficiently in the Labour/ Lib Dem direction. They say the party needs to win back voters from Labour and Lib Dems by moving closer to their preoccupations and ideas. They want to downplay migration, move closer to the EU, talk more about public services and uphold the European human rights law.

The more conservative minded group thinks they lost because many former Conservative voters either stayed at home or voted Reform. They want a new Conservative Party to have a credible offer of much lower migration, lower tax rates and a more focused state, using Brexit freedoms to promote global U.K.

To help them examine this choice it might be useful to analyse voting patterns in Wokingham, one of many seats that passed from Conservatives to Lib Dems or Labour.

In 2024 the Conservative vote plunged by 13,336
The Labour vote fell by 2819 , a nearly identical percentage fall to the Conservative vote

The Lib Dem vote rose by 2392

The new Reform vote was 5274

So if you add Lib Dem and Labour their combined vote was slightly down. There was no net switch from Conservative to Lib/Lab. The most likely explanation of changes in their votes is more Labour voters switched to Lib Dem to defeat the Conservatives.

Even if you thought all 2392 extra Lib Dem votes came from Conservatives you still need to explain where the other 11,000 missing Conservative votes went. The most likely explanation for the 13,336 fewer Conservative votes is many of them voted for Reform with the larger number staying at home. This would marry with the national outcome.

The voting pattern means there are many voters who want a more identifiably conservative approach to borders, taxes, economic growth than the last government managed and than Labour is offering. They split between voting Conservative, voting Reform and abstaining. The new Conservative leader will be in a struggle with Reform over who can best represent this group. Both Conservatives and Reform also will be looking for a platform with wider

appeal that is compatible with the core economic policy and border controls they need to unite this large group of conservative voters. Reform have added the Lib Dem policy of proportional representation to their offer which complicates their priorities.