

The Reform phenomenon

Recent polls show Reform just a point or two behind the Conservatives, with one showing them 3% ahead. They are the clear winners of the election campaign if you believe the polls.

The polls show both Labour and Conservative weakening a little over the campaign, with Labour sometimes dipping below 40% and the Conservatives struggling around 20%. In 2017 in the election the Conservatives polled 42% and Labour 40%, a combined total of 82% with no majority of seats for either. Instead today their combined total is around 60% but Labour is forecast to have a huge majority of MP s. Why?

There is a frustration that the two parties are so alike. They both backed COVID lockdowns. They both backed printing large sums of money which proved inflationary. They both back OBR orthodoxy which makes a growth policy difficult. They have both presided over large increases in NHS waiting lists, Labour in Wales and Conservatives in England. They both backed the Windsor framework limiting the opportunities of Brexit. Neither proposed a good pruning of EU bureaucracy and regulations. Both allowed large scale migration.

Reform have tapped into these frustrations, but have not proposed answers that can right the wrongs. Their answer to the Bank of England disasters is to impose a £35 bn tax like charge on commercial banks . Why don't they demand an end to the colossal Bank losses coming from needlessly selling long bonds at a loss? That would save a lot of money for tax cuts.

Their answer to the small boats is to turn them round or send them back. Border Force say that is impossible and refuse to do it. Lawyers are ready to show it is illegal. France refuses to let the people land. Reform want lower legal migration, but that is now at last government policy. They could identify the further categories they would ban or restrict.

Reform have taken up scrapping IR 35 and raising the VAT threshold for small business, ideas I spent the last Parliament promoting. I agree with those.

Reform want proportional representation. I disagree. Whilst our system can mean the majority have to put up with a government that only got 43% of the vote the system has two big advantages over PR. We elect a named MP for a constituency which makes MPs much more attentive to local views and needs. A government has the votes to keep its promises so we can judge them at the next election. PR systems usually bring weak governments. The parties form a coalition by ditching the promises to voters that got them elected making accountability difficult or impossible. The result of the combined actions of Reform and the One Nation Conservative leadership if the polls are right will be to visit on us a Labour government that may have a lower vote share than Labour led by Jeremy Corbyn gained in 2017 but have a large majority of MPs giving it a lot of potential power if it can keep its party together.