

# Government use of data

I was asked about government data in the election, so I thought today I would share with you my reply:

I entirely agree that we need to improve the skills of our nation in handling and using data. The government is planning more emphasis on science, maths and data, which will be covered by new T levels as well.

I also agree that new policies should be underpinned by evidence. That is the approach I have always adopted as policy adviser and as someone involved in the national debate over major concerns.

There are issues both over the quality of data available to government and over the way some choose to interpret or use it. I myself use a lot of the economic data for the interventions I make in the national debate on public spending, economic growth and taxation. All too often the basis of a series is changed making comparison over time more difficult. There are regular changes to the back data, long after the intense political debate about the numbers has passed on. We often find the sharp political exchanges have attacked and defended wrong numbers.

The current changes being put through on inflation are an example of the complexity, with RPI giving way to CPI now giving way to a new index which includes a proxy for owner occupied housing costs which may not capture the reality. This is an example of an important index which has consequences for people's lives, as benefits are uprated and index bondholders rewarded by reference to one or other of these indices.

In some of the important figures for debate the independent officials make forecasts which can have great political significance. For example, the OBR forecast poor revenues for the almost completed 2016-17 year in the November Autumn Statement, only to have to put back £8bn of revenue they left out from the November forecast in the March update. It is a good job the government did not respond to the November figures by cutting spending or increasing taxes to keep the deficit on target, as it turns out it was not off target as I argued at the time. There are always dangers in official figures that require judgements or rely on models which have not in the past accurately reflected what has happened.

The UK economic figures are subject to revision for many years after the date to which they apply. IT reminds us that decision takers often do have to make judgements without access to proper data. That is another area where a democratic system has its advantages. If the decision takers are in touch with those most affected, they will know qualitatively about the problem and the solutions which can help avoid a mistake based on partial, inaccurate or misunderstood data.

You can rest assured I will continue to highlight problems, working to our shared goal of more accurate numbers used intelligently and fairly to

underpin policy.

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## Time to govern

The Conservatives as the largest party will have enough seats to govern. After two major constitutional referendums and two General elections in recent years it is time for Parliament and government to make decisions and to see through the decisions UK voters have made.

As expected here, Scottish voters signalled their impatience with the idea of re running the referendum on independence. UK voters rejected the Lib Dem idea of a second Brexit referendum, voting by a huge margin for Con/Lab who both argued to accept Brexit and to leave the single market.

Given the election of 7 Sinn Fein MPs and the Speaker and Deputy Speakers, you only need 320 MPs to form the government as a single party and govern. The DUP is likely to support much of the time anyway.

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## The election reduces uncertainty about the future of the UK

This election has seen most voters decide to support parties that accept Brexit. It looks likely that the Lib Dems who advocated a second referendum on EU membership will poll badly. Most people have seen that any such suggestion would undermine the UK's negotiating position with the EU over our future relationship and leave us much weakened and diminished as a country. There is no reason why the EU should offer us better terms if we had the chance to vote down the terms agreed, and every reason why they should offer us worse terms if they think there is a chance to retain our full contributions and other obligations upon us.

It also looks as if the SNP will poll less well than in 2015 because they back a second referendum on independence for Scotland. Just four months after they proposed a second poll, they spent much of the campaign playing it down and trying to talk about something else, as they came to see it was making them less popular.

The UK has enjoyed plenty of democratic votes recently, with 2 General Elections and two major constitutional referendums. This election is sending a clear message to the next government. It's now time for the elected politicians to deliver the wishes of the people as expressed in those

referendums, and to get on and govern.

Published and promoted by Fraser Mc Farland on behalf of John Redwood, both at 30 Rose Street Wokingham RG 40 1XU

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## [Election Day](#)

Now it's your turn. Today voters decide who should represent us in the next Parliament.

I have had my say, so I will write about something unconnected to the UK election this morning.

Last week Mr Trump announced he was pulling the USA out of the Paris climate Agreement of 2015. This met with substantial protest from governments around the world. Mrs Merkel and the EU were especially vocal in condemning his action.

The Paris Agreement laid down two things. It set out voluntary targets for reductions of CO2 by the advanced country signatories, and allowed developing countries more latitude on their targets as growth often comes with more energy consumption. It established a Green Climate Fund for the advanced nations to make substantial payments to the developing world to help fund their investments in renewable energy and energy efficiency. Mr Obama was particularly proud of the decision, and is very critical of his successor.

Mr Trump argued that the USA is expected to pay too much, and the others have not done enough. He argued that far from limiting coal and carbon dioxide it would shift coal production from the USA to China. He argued that the costs were severe on the USA, with large losses in prospect for coal and wider industry, whilst the gain in total carbon dioxide reduced worldwide would be small.

I am giving you the chance to write about Mr Trump and his critics on this important subject, knowing you will write about what you want to.

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## [This election is about Brexit](#)

The Liberal Democrats could not be clearer. They dislike Brexit. They are not

reconciled to the decision of UK voters, and are offering a second referendum on Brexit were they to be able to influence government. They have said they will likely campaign for Remain again in such a referendum.

The Lib Dems have issued leaflets with "Want to stop a disastrous Hard Brexit?" on the front, and a message from their Leader "demanding" a second referendum on the second page. They have campaigned to turn this General Election into a second referendum on Brexit by urging all who want to try to reverse the referendum decision to vote for them to secure another vote. They are wrong to suggest their opponents want a disastrous Brexit. No party wants a disastrous Brexit. Realists accept membership of the single market is not on offer for a non EU state. The issue is mutual access, not membership.

If the polls are right and they come well behind the two leading parties we will be able to conclude that most voters now accept the verdict of the referendum and wish a new government to get on and implement it in the best way possible. Many people think the UK would look silly and place itself in a very weak position if two years after telling our partners we were leaving we wanted to change our mind and tried to get old terms of membership back.

One of my few cherished memorabilia of past Liberal Democrat campaigns is their leaflet saying "It's time for a real referendum on Europe". Issued when Conservatives were trying to stop the Lisbon Treaty, Lib Dems then declined to help us get a vote on that but recommended an In/Out vote. Conservatives offered just such a vote after Lisbon had gone through, when the Lib Dems changed their mind again and did not support. They stated quite clearly in that original leaflet "Only a real referendum on Britain's membership of the EU will let the people decide our country's future. "

Brave words. What a pity that when we gave the people that decision and they made it, Lib Dems then decided they knew better than the voters and demand we do it all over again. Funny idea of democracy.

They now claim that the referendum was advisory – though the government wrote to every household saying voters would decide. They go on to claim Leave voters were conned by arguments over the money. That cannot be true, given the endless complaints they made about the figures throughout the referendum campaign, seeking to put across their view of the amounts in dispute.

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