

Why did Labour lose?

I rarely write about the Opposition parties, preferring to concentrate on how government can do better.

We will, however, hear a lot about Labour's future as they embark on choosing a new leader. Our constitution thrives best with a strong Opposition that looks like a government in waiting, so what Labour does will matter. For this reason I am interested in your thoughts on what they might do next. It was interesting that the biggest array of freebies ever offered in an election did not tease out more supporters.

Their first self appointed task is to work out why they lost so many seats in 2019. They have been all but eliminated in Scotland where they used to be dominant, have been largely excluded from the South outside London and lost many seats in old heartlands in the North and Midlands. They are an urban party with a strong dependence on the capital.

The last election was two elections at the same time. There was a Leave/Remain battle. The Lib Dems tried to make it an election to revoke our departure, and the Conservatives stressed the need to get Brexit done. Labour was scarcely part of this contest, as they sought to present a range of Remain tilted opinions as a new policy whilst saying they were also a home for Leave voters. Their spokesmen and women were unconvincing on the biggest issue of the day. Anyone desperate to keep us in the EU would vote Lib Dem and anyone keen to leave would vote Conservative.

The second election was about economic and social policy. Labour led this debate with a comprehensive offer of much more state control and "free" goods and services for people, against a Conservative targeted offer of spending increases on the NHS, schools and police. Some in Labour claim to have "won" this battle of ideas, yet the polling evidence suggests otherwise.

Those who think Labour's twin problems were Brexit and the personality and past record of their Leader cling to the hope that otherwise their ideas were popular. Instead the more free offers Labour launched, the more people felt their policy was unaffordable. The answer that only the rich would pay did not add up, and was contradicted by their Manifesto itself with the ending of the marriage allowance.

It appears the voters rejected not just Labour's Brexit stance but also their economic offer. People remembered what happened with past Labour governments spending and nationalising too much. Tomorrow I will look at what they could or might do next.