

Why I'm not voting in 2019

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“I've been dreaming of a time when the English are sick to death of Labour and Tories”

Morrissey, 2004

And so we are in full election swing in what is shaping up to be the most depressing democratic exercise to date in an already politically depressing century. The purpose of an election was I understood to engage the country in a decision making process which would move beyond the stagnant narrative of the past three years. It would deliver a more rounded debate about UK policy than the ‘in-out’ repetition we've been forced to endure.

In its place we have a Prime Minister who whenever he sets foot in public is capable of only speaking in platitudes ending in ‘get Brexit done’. We have a Leader of the Opposition still unable to succinctly state his position beyond a better deal and second referendum. We have a Lib Dem leader declared pro-business simply by supporting the EU status quo. And a conviction politician and protest movement leader allegedly cashing in on follower's non-returnable deposits for a desired peerage. Absent in all of this is any broader discussion or debate on how the problems endemic in the UK will be addressed.

In the run up to polling day, the opinion polls are a staple for political enthusiasts. And I have to admit they look pretty grim. Odds are seemingly on for a Tory majority. This is in the aftermath of a governing period which has seen escalations in crime^[i] and homelessness^[ii], fudged unemployment figures^[iii], and a crippled NHS with 66% of Trusts in deficit^[iv].

National debt has grown to the tune of £1tn whilst operating under a banner of fiscal responsibility^[v]. Yet large proportions of the country are seemingly happy with this over an untested alternative. Which is akin to keeping a car that perpetually breaks down, on the basis you have no guarantee a replacement would be better.

The disappointment here is there has been no real swing away from the two large parties. In 2017, Emmanuel Macron stormed to presidential victory in France with 66% of the vote, in the process unseating a two-party domination stretching back to 1981. His progressive party, En Marche, followed this by winning 53% of national assembly seats a few months later.

The prospect of such a radical transformation here is scant, be it through a coalition of 16m Leavers (less the dead) moving to the ideologically hollow Brexit Party or 17m Remainers (including newly enfranchised) turning to the progressive but poorly promoted Lib Dems. Instead we are destined to remain in the drudgery of a bleak political landscape devoid of modern rhetoric. Whilst Labour chant 'for the many', reusing slogans from their 1970's heyday, the Tory's call for 'Global Britain' is an embalmed Victorian eulogy from the 1870's. The nation has truly run out of ideas.

I therefore will not be voting on 12th December. This is a shift from my usual stance. I have always previously felt democratic participation is a civic responsibility. But the absence of any ideas and the shocking state of political culture and leadership are only part of the problem. It is also the fundamentally unfit-for-purpose electoral system we endure.

I have voted in every general election since 1992. And in all but two of these, a minority candidate has won in my constituency. By this, I mean the representative the constituency returned was one who gained less than 50% of all votes, thus seeing a larger number of unrewarded votes cast than rewarded ones (Table 1).

Table 1: Rewarded/unrewarded votes in my home constituency 1992-2017

	<u>Constituency</u>	<u>Rewarded Votes (%)</u>	<u>Unrewarded Votes (%)</u>	<u>Candidates</u>
1992	Worthing	57	43	5
1997	Worthing West	46.1	53.9	5
2001	Worthing West	47.5	52.5	4
2005	Bath	43.9	56.1	7
2010	Bournemouth West	45.1	54.9	5
2015	Birmingham Edgbaston	44.9	55.1	7
2017	Birmingham Edgbaston	55.3	44.7	5

This situation gets worse when you look at the national picture (Table 2). At no point in the last 40 years has a government been elected with a mandate of 45% of the votes or above. The wider influx of political parties occurring from 2005 saw this share drop to under 40% for three successive terms, until the post-Brexit election of 2017. As depressing as this is, consider these figures further; electoral turnout and government votes in 1979 were higher than those recorded in 2015, despite the UK population growing by over 9 million in the intervening years. This is a damning statement of disenfranchisement.

Table 2: Electoral turnout and government voting 1979-2017

<u>Year</u>	<u>Turnout (000's)</u>	<u>Government (000's)</u>	<u>% Votes</u>
1979	31,221	13,698	44%
1983	30,671	13,012	42%
1987	32,530	13,761	42%
1992	33,614	14,093	42%
1997	31,286	13,518	43%
2001	26,367	10,725	41%
2005	27,149	9,552	35%
2010	29,688	10,704	36%
2015	30,698	11,300	37%
2017	32,204	13,637	42%

So my position will probably create some consternation and disapproval in a number of quarters. And I should point out that, having recently moved, I'm in the privileged position of living in a Labour-Lib Dem marginal – two parties I would consider voting for – where the Conservative candidate historically gets around 10% of the vote. Were I in my former home, a Tory-Labour marginal, it's likely I would be less blasé. But we cannot fundamentally continue to patronise and justify a system that alienates so many in all corridors (beside, ironically, those of the EU).

You may tell me if I don't vote, then I don't have a voice. But the data would suggest I'm not going to have one regardless. 2019 seems to be something of a landmark moment in the UK. But at this landmark moment, we are woefully devoid of any form of quality leadership, statesmanship, or frankly ideas.

In place we see petty one-upmanship, the dominance of a reductionist debate, and the mainstreaming of the dirty tricks, disinformation, and blatant lies of the 2016 referendum all neatly packaged and presented by mainstream and social media (last night's rebranding of CCHQ's twitter feed as 'FactCheck UK' is a clear illustration). And none of it

inspires me to disrupt my daily schedule to participate in an ever redundant conceit.

[i] <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-42749089>

[ii] <https://www.crisis.org.uk/ending-homelessness/homelessness-knowledge-hub/homelessness-monitor/england/the-homelessness-monitor-england-2018>

[iii] <https://www.theguardian.com/business/2019/oct/17/unemployment-figures-should-be-millions-higher-says-research>

[iv] <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2018/jul/13/nhs-operation-waiting-lists-reach-10-year-high-at-43m-patients> ; <https://www.nao.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/Financial-Sustainability-of-the-NHS.pdf>

[v] <https://www.thenational.scot/news/17537879.has-no-one-noticed-the-uk-national-debt-has-topped-2-trillion/> ; <https://www.ft.com/content/7bdf8538-e070-11e9-9743-db5a370481bc>