

Chiltern U3A 'Political Thinking'

Meeting No 43 Monday 16th December 2019

Summary

The General Election the previous week was discussed under three headings; the campaign, the election result and the longer term significance.

Opinions were divided as to whether the campaign had provided clarity for voter choice, that the election result did not provide an accurate reflection of the vote share was considered to be the norm in British politics, and longer term the only near-certainty seemed to be that Britain would actually leave the EU.

Discussion

1. The campaign

Did the parties present a clear choice to the electors?

Were the different policies adequately defined?

Were the campaigning methods reasonable?

Locally did the Chesham and Amersham constituency participate significantly in the election?

Though there were differences in manifestos, none of the parties were thought to have put forward a credible programme for a 5 year government. Some were vague and others just unbelievable.

There had been little campaigning in any of the constituencies where group members had voted.

Most of the group felt they had watched the election rather than participating.

2. The election result

Share of the vote and representation in Parliament.

Combined vote share of pro Leave parties 48%; pro Remain or 2nd ref 52%.

Tory vote share increased only by 1%

Yet

Parliament - huge Leave majority.

Smaller parties appear under-represented and larger ones over-represented.

Does the system provide a government that represents how the electorate voted?

The group were little concerned that Parliamentary representation did not match the vote share of the parties. It was recognised that no party would have achieved a majority had seats been distributed in accordance with national vote share.

Non proportional representation seems to be an acceptable feature of British politics

365 MPs now owe their positions entirely to Boris

Is the consequence of a strong government dominated by one personality a “good” outcome?
(whatever good might mean !)

The concentration of power in one person was not considered to present a danger or concern.

3. Longer term significance

Leadership

The two successful - Tory and SNP- parties appear to have effective leadership.

Did the Remain side ever have an effective leader?

The less successful parties appear to have less effective leaders.

Is it leadership, rather than policy, that determines a political party's success?

The group noted with some surprise the importance of the leader; there was speculation that had BJ chosen to support Remain then that would have been the outcome.

Representation.

The significant change in support for the Tories came from areas that have not voted Tory before. Support in some areas that previously were Tory was reduced somewhat.

Is this going to affect policies?

Is the Remain voice now really dead?. Will the large conurbations eg London where the Remain vote is concentrated and where most of the wealth of the UK is generated accept the economic consequences?

How the result will affect policies remains to be seen

The Union.

Scotland and Northern Ireland voted more strongly Remain.

Can the Union survive?

Considerable doubt was expressed over the future of the Union.

Constitutional reform.

Electoral reform especially was not likely to be on the agenda.

Strengthening the Executive branch at the expense of Parliament seemed a more likely direction.