



This years election is like no other, that's for sure. With all the competing party's on top of the traditional two plus one, voters are finding it hard to settle on a clear favourite.

The polls are matching the two main party's at neck and neck consistently. Whilst, the EU bashing UKIP and independent dreaming SNP garner favour in unprecedented numbers. The poor Liberals, traditionally the protest party of choice, have plummeted in popularity during their stint in government.

What has gone wrong for the Tory's and Labour is hard to establish in this modern electoral nightmare. But one thing is for certain, politics is not that simple anymore.

Austerity has blown consensus out of the water. People who were attached to the old order in politics now look for scapegoats all over the place. For the nationalists it's Westminster. For UKIP it's Europe and the influx of migrants. The electorate are not placated by data showing more people working than ever or wages growing for the first time since the downturn. They simply want something different.

Nicola Sturgeon, the SNP leader, blames Cameron and austerity. She keeps banging on about wanting a deal with Labour to lock the Tory's out of Downing Street. A deal most Scots would relish. But that does nothing for Labour. Accepting a deal in public before the election would

simply throw Labour out of Scottish politics too. They would become as irrelevant north of the border as the Conservative party has since Thatcher's days.

Sturgeon's priority is to grab as much power as she can, and as quickly as she can, in Westminster. This will enable her to force a new referendum through on independence. It's important to remember, Sturgeon's whole *raison d'être* is the break up the Union. Her strength north of the border, if the polls are to be believed, will be total after the election. And that divorce will be irresistible if she gets anywhere near the levers of power in London.

The nationalists in Wales are also banking on division too. Leanne Wood has performed well in the debates on TV. Unlike the SNP, Plaid Cymru's foothold isn't as comprehensive, but in this era of change, who knows what can happen. Her direct approach to the people of Wales was effective and measured. While I haven't read the Welsh press, I expect her performances to have gone down well in the Principality.

While Sturgeon and Wood are wedded to independence UKIP are intent on a breakaway of a different type. Extrication from the EU is in their blood. Total and complete withdrawal from Brussels is Farage's aim. I find this unusual from a man that has been paid handsomely by the EU for some time. All the country's problems appear to be solvable by withdrawing from the EU and introducing an Australian-style points system for entry into the country. I sometimes wonder if his next proposal will be to build a giant wall around the country to stop foreign people coming in.

His brand of populism is definitely resonating with the public though. Polls for the election are putting them ahead of the Liberal Democrats. Their two MP's, Carswell & Reckless, both Tory defectors may be added to on May 7. If they are, and they get enough support, Farage may be the man who hands Cameron the keys to Number 10 for another 5 years.

The Liberal Democrats are polling at extremely low figures, vying with UKIP and the Greens. It's proving to be hard for Nick Clegg to retain any authority after jumping in bed with the Tory's 5 years ago and propping Cameron up in the first coalition government in many years. His ditching of a flagship policy like tuition fees hurt him badly. He has never really recovered. There are even murmurs about him losing his seat at the election. Polls come and go. We'll have to wait on that one.

Labour are struggling to take a lead over the unpopular Tory's. The memory of the crash still hangs heavily over them from 2008. Brown's government left a hefty deficit after the necessary bail out of the banks. But there is a new man at the helm and despite popular fights against the press, the energy companies and others, Miliband struggles to make a mark. His performances have been good in the televised debates. He will have only gained from the added exposure. Unlike the Tory's, they're not setting a date on eventual debt eradication, preferring to reduce it slower and where they can. They have definitely learned from Cameron's bold intention in 2010 that was never achievable.

Where Labour have failed is to instil in the public mind that it was the banks that caused the crash. Yes, they were in power, and yes, the rules in the banking system were lax. But at the time even the Tory party were insisting on even more lax measures.

Cameron's tenure in Downing Street is one of missed opportunities and unashamedly championing the rich, or in modern parlance, the Wealth Creators. He promised no top down reorganisation of the NHS, but did it. He promised to get rid of the deficit. He hasn't. He promised fairness while cutting taxes for the wealthy and imposing the Bedroom Tax on the poor. He didn't learn the lessons from Blair on Iraq when he wanted to tackle al Assad in Syria with Obama.

His legacy appears to be a low wage economy. Division between the haves and have-nots. Decimated public services. An increasingly privatised NHS and uncertainty in the jobs market with issues such as zero-hour contracts.

On 7 May the electorate, those that are registered to vote, or can be bothered to, will choose the next government. Many don't vote at all and that's the fault of both the electorate and the politicians. People should be engaged in the electoral process and it's important that politicians give people something to vote for.

For keen observers it will be an interesting time. For a lot of others, it will be business as usual.