

[Transcript] The News Agents / Are the Tories heading for extinction?

This is a Global Player Original Podcast.

Marjorie Diana Nicholson.

77.

Freedom for Choice of Smokers.

John David Albury.

Natural Law Party.

70.

Ian Perez Pearson.

Labour.

28,400.

CHEERING AND APPLAUSE

And Graham Eric Pussell.

Conservatives.

7,706.

CHEERING AND APPLAUSE

I hereby declare that Ian Perez Pearson
has been duly elected to serve as Member of Parliament
for the Dudley-West constituency.

CHEERING AND APPLAUSE

So, Labour, no surprise.

I know, I know, you're thinking we've screwed up on the news
agents that we've played out the wrong by-election result.

No, it wasn't Tamworth.

No, it wasn't Mid-Beds.

It was Dudley-West in the winter of 1994.

The by-election that told us that something seismic
was happening in British politics.

If the US Geological Survey could have measured
what happened that night, it would have been a seven.

But what happened last night in Tamworth?

A Mid-Beds was a nine.

It was exceptional.

The Labour victories are huge.

And in the 92 to 97 Parliament,

Ken Clark once said that you keep thinking
you've hit rock bottom only to find you can go even lower.

Arguably, the Conservatives are in that position now.

This is John. Welcome to the News Agents.

The News Agents.

Strathen, Alistair Luke, Labour Party, 13,872.

I therefore, duly declare Alistair Luke Strathen
elected as Member of Parliament
for the Mid-Bedfordshire Parliamentary Constituency.

Edwards, Sarah Sienna, Labour Party, 11,719 votes.

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And I do hereby declare that Sarah Sienna, Edwards is duly elected.

CHEERING

Tonight, the people of Tamworth have voted for Labour's positive vision and a fresh start.

Each of those results is extraordinary.

It's history in the making.

The party of the future, the party of national renewal is this changed Labour Party.

So we go forward, thank you so much, an incredible result.

That is Keir Starmer in Labour Mid-Bedfordshire.

Yeah. Labour Mid-Bedfordshire.

A seat that has been Conservative for nearly 100 years has now changed hands in a really spectacular by-election, not just because Labour won it,

but because it was also a three-way fight

which made it seem like the Tories would be the favourite to come through the middle and somehow hold the seat as Labour and Liberal Democrats fought each other.

The Labour MP, Alastair Stratham,

is probably not going to be there for very long.

It's hard to imagine that he will hold on to mid-Bedfordshire at the general election, if he does.

Oh, my God, we're talking election wipeout for the Conservative Party.

He had a narrow majority of about 1,200 over his Tory rival, Emma Holland-Lindsay.

The Liberal Democrat candidate was third with 9,420.

In terms of size of the majority that Nadine Dorries had at the last election, well, it was like, I mean, 24,000 or something ridiculous.

It was absolutely huge.

And then we had the Tamworth result in the so-called Redwall Midlands.

And that as well was equally astonishing,

just in terms of the size of the swing that allowed Labour to take that seat as well.

And again, an enormous victory for Labour.

Neither of these seats, Tamworth or Mid-Beds, are in anything like on the target list of seats that Labour need to win to win a general election.

It all went way beyond that.

And so I do think it is not hyperbolic to talk about these being the most extraordinary set of by-election results

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that I think anyone can remember.

I'm joined in the studio, as we are on Tames Like This

by Lara Spirit, the editor of Redbox at The Times newspaper.

And you're looking a little bleary-eyed and looking as though...

Thank you.

I always like to make our guests feel very comfortable and warm and you look like you've been up all night.

You have.

Yeah, I've got a face for radio today, I think it's fair to say.

Yeah.

What do you make of it?

I mean, it is an extraordinary set of by-election results,

I think, and it's difficult to speak to anyone

who denies their significance.

Of course, I think just two facts, one from each,

stand out to anybody that was waking up to this news this morning.

In Tamworth, the second biggest swing from the Conservatives

to Labour at any by-election since the Second World War

and mid-Bedfordshire, the largest numerical majority

overturned at a by-election.

You have to go back, as I did this morning, to 1962

to find a day when the Conservatives lost two by-elections

to Labour on a single day.

Now, even on that day, it was arguably not as bad

because the Conservatives held some other by-election seats.

But that was, of course, just a couple of years before

Harold Wilson came in to Downing Street

with that election victory in 1964.

And indeed, he came in with a slogan of 13 wasted years,

a slogan not dissimilar to that that you hear Keir Starmer use

currently in Starmer and his own speech referencing

that particular election victory.

So certainly fair to say that these are two very

significant by-election results.

I think we're used to seeing double losses for the Conservatives

in recent years in by-elections.

We had them in June 2022.

Of course, we also had them lose two in July.

But in July, they held on to Uxbridge, of course,

and that was seen as the silver lining.

Whereas at this point, it's very hard to find anybody this morning

who says that this could be in any way good news

for the Conservatives.

Now, some who I've spoken to in the Tory party

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will say a few things in their defence.

They will say that the Labour vote was weaker than the Tory vote being lost, i.e. the Tories were more important.

The Labour vote didn't go up that much.

It was just that all the Tory voters stayed at home.

Exactly.

And also, interestingly, coming from, you know, a Conservative that wants to see them do well, the vote share for Reform UK was greater than the Labour majority in both of the seats.

I think to their mind, that means that perhaps in a general election those voters who might be more protest-inclined might come back into the fold.

The other point to note is, of course, that turnout was down in these elections.

Are those people staying away that are more likely to vote Conservative?

Well, some loyal Tories that you speak to this morning will insist so.

So, you mentioned Uxbridge there.

And Uxbridge had, it felt even at the time, an outsized effect on Conservative party thinking, in that it almost reshaped their strategy of how they were going to fight.

And Rishi Sunak announcing that he was kind of rowing back on some of the stiffer measures towards reaching net zero, following the whole kind of you-less thing, and that was the bandwagon.

It makes Uxbridge look more like an outlier now, rather than something significant on which Tories can build policy.

Yeah, I think that's fair to say, you know,

these results mean that there have been eight 20 percentage point by-election swings

in the last three years, five of them in the last three months.

So, in that sense, Uxbridge perhaps does look like an outlier,

although Tories that you speak to will say, actually, when you look at some of the polling

around those net zero measures, some of that did quite well.

That actually, if you go into an election campaign, you still have a lot of time to try and persuade people of their merits, of your merits.

Of course, Rishi Sunak's big pitch to be the changed candidate

I think does look slightly more difficult to land

as a result of this morning's by-elections,

not least because after the conference,

we saw no discernible bounce for the party.

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We also saw his own approval ratings as low as they ever have been.

There are an awful lot of conservative MPs who are opening up their laptops this morning and thinking, where is that file with my CV on it?

I wonder whether I ought to be updating it because I might be looking for a new job.

Well, as you said, I think both of these seats are very difficult to see how in any normal election year you would be able to hold them.

The Conservatives will most likely win these seats back in the next election.

It would be completely extraordinary if they didn't.

But Frank Lunt's great American pollster has said, I think before the Conservative Party conference, that any Tory MP with a majority of less than 8,000 should be thinking about looking for a new job.

Now, I spoke to a number of Tory MPs who were quite happy to admit that they were sort of casually doing just that when I put that question to them at a conference.

Well, they are getting the CVs up today.

Senior Conservative MP, I spoke to you earlier on in the week, said that actually it might be nicer to lose their seat in the coming election because they could take a break.

They don't necessarily want to be around for what comes next.

They're not interested in the kind of fight back for the Conservative Party.

They'd rather come back into Parliament when they've got themselves into better shape and potentially in a much more electable form as they might be immediately after a big, rubbing defeat when there'll be a lot of finger pointing and a lot of kind of internecine blaming.

So what does number 10 do?

You've relaunched the strategy that Rishi is the change candidate, which they did in Manchester three weeks ago.

It doesn't seem to be working.

It feels to me, and I was a political correspondent then, like it was in 1996,

where John Major is desperately hoping that something, anything, comes along that will change his fortunes because Labour is forging ahead.

And this, in terms of these by-elections and the figures that you're talking about

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are much more like 96, 97, than they were 91, 92.
Yeah, so Conservatives that you'll talk to
who remain optimistic or at least think
that they're in with a fighting chance
will cite the 92 general election and not the 97 general election.
Of course.
As evidence that actually it's possible for the polls to narrow,
it's possible for you not to win.
But I think in that key instance, you know,
92 was very much a presidential campaign.
You had, you know, a great campaign video of John Major going around.
In Britain, going back to where he grew up.
Exactly. He was seen as the strong point in that.
I think the recent dip in Rishi's next personal approval ratings
make that strategy difficult.
So I think you're right to say that.
If you compare polling evidence, if you compare polls 91, 92 to now,
I mean, they're nothing like each other.
There were a lot more polls that were absolutely
had Labour and Conservatives neck and neck
in the run-up to the 92 election,
whereas everything we're seeing at the moment
shows Labour is still forging well ahead
and by-elections to prove it.
So I think there are two things that Conservatives will say to you
when you say that it is a grim inevitability
that they might lose the next election
if that's what you believe they will say.
You know, we could see the economy pick up.
If we see inflation fall, which is, of course,
Rishi Sunak's number one priority, one that he set out
at the beginning of the year,
then you can say to people,
look, don't trust Labour with the recovery.
It's a very delicate thing.
It's something Rishi has worked very hard at.
He's a very clever man,
and he is the one that you can trust to see that through.
It's something they focused on, a huge amount,
and something that you'll hear him and Jeremy Hunt,
the Chancellor talk about a huge amount
in the run-up to the old statement and thereafter.
The second is on small boats,
and I think this is something that will come back into the news

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in a very big way quite soon.
Of course, we're expecting the Supreme Court ruling on Rwanda soon.
Now, there is a clear dividing line between the Labour Party and the Conservative Party on this particular issue, and it's one leading Conservatives think is a very electorally salient one.
Now, you might disagree, but this is what a number of them say, and they will say that, actually, if the Supreme Court say that it's legal, but even if they don't, and it comes into wider legal dispute, that if you can get some flights up and running, Keir Starmer has said, he said at Labour Conference recently, even in a situation where the Rwanda scheme is working, we're going to scrap it, and Rishi Sunak's team will say, well, that is a very clear dividing line that we have.
You're saying that in a situation where a scheme that we have that looks like it's working, it's, again, one of his key priorities, the fifth priority to stop the boats, you're saying that you're not going to do that, and indeed, Keir Starmer, when he did make that recent, semi-recent intervention on small boats, he said that he would look to be working more closely with the European Union. He wanted to treat people who make those crossings possible as traffickers and that they would be penalised as such.
Now, that was, I think, something that some people close to Sarma would admit was quite a difficult few days, because, of course, there were those responses immediately saying, well, actually, you'll have to accept a quota with the European Union if you want to deal with them.
So I think, yeah, that is something that will be another big issue for them, and that's one of the reasons why they think the election might not be lost if you could fight it on either boats or the economy.
Right, and I want to come to the election timing because you had a great story this morning that there has been a warning that you can't have

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a general election next November because that would clash with the US presidential election, and you can't have two of the five, five eyes countries, i.e. Australia, Canada, New Zealand, Britain, and America in elections at the same time because of cybersecurity risk. So officials have warned some in government that there could be huge security risks while you'd have a situation where both the US and the UK held concurrent contests. So obviously the US election to be held on the 5th of November, there is a nervousness in government, especially given how close that US election looks like it could be, especially given the possible risks that it could be contested, that actually it was worth saying and that it had been routine advice that their security risks were such that you would not want to see those two overlap. The last year in which they overlapped was 1992, the last year in which the campaigns overlapped was 1964. So this is not something that is common, but actually obviously we know Rishi Sunak recently ruled out a earlier general election. The cybersecurity risks were slightly less in 1964 than they are now. Well, exactly, and I think the point being that Rishi Sunak has had to rule out holding an early election, it's widely expected to be in the autumn. Now, you don't need to have it in November in the autumn, you can have it in October. If you have it in October, you then have a very realistic question about your party conferences, which of course are a very big source of income, both the lay party and the conservative party, an important source of income. Does Rishi Sunak want to forego those conferences, or does he want to pull some MPs who will be defending their seats and will have to be fighting tooth and nail to defend their seats to come to the party conference and support him and his wider agenda there? I think that would create some difficult questions. So it's an interesting dilemma. Lara, fabulous. Thank you. You can sleep now.

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Thank you.

We're going to hear from the three main parties very shortly for their reactions to the results.

But for the Liberal Democrats, this was prime territory on which to get a bandwagon rolling, to come, as they've done in so many by elections before, to come through and steal it away.

They didn't.

And I'm joined now by Daisy Cooper.

She is the MP for St Albans, neighbouring mid-beds.

Daisy Cooper, what went wrong?

In mid-bed for cheer, well, we're clearly disappointed.

You know, we had had these four stunning by-election wins in other parts of the country.

We were really hoping to replicate that in mid-bed for cheer.

But as it turned out, it became a three-way fight.

But we're really proud of the fact that we have doubled our share of the vote.

And we've proven once again

that we can win over the support and votes of lifelong conservative voters.

We did that right across mid-bed for cheer, but particularly in some of those rural villages.

And if we can replicate that again at a future general election, then I think we can be instrumental to, hopefully, beating the conservatives when the general election comes.

What happened to the Lib Dem bandwagon?

If ever there was a seat that was right for that bandwagon to roll, it was mid-bed for cheer.

Largely rural seat.

I would have thought Labour would have had very little chance in it.

And yet, Labour won.

Well, we always knew, and we said all along,

that it was going to be a really tall order to try and come from third to win that seat.

It always is a tall order to come from first to win.

But the Lib Dem, that's what you do.

That's what you do.

By-election's your forte.

You're able to pour the resources in, get that momentum going, pavement politics, all the rest of it.

We did manage to get a huge amount of momentum.

And as I say, we managed to double our vote share.

That's not an insignificant achievement.

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If you look at the other political parties, knife of the conservatives or Labour did manage to increase their vote share overall. So I think what you can see is that we have managed to make huge progress there. And we've been sort of instrumental in helping to defeat the conservatives in this by-election. Look, you're being very on message, and you're being the party spokesperson. And I know all of that. This is a podcast. We want to talk about the politics of this. I mean, I thought it was fascinating. What happened in this by-election was that there was no non-aggression pact with you and the Labour Party. You both went for it. Ed Davy has said that if the Tories are the biggest single party at the next election, the Liberal Democrats are not going to help them form another government. Therefore, the implication of that is that obviously you'd like there to be a Liberal Democrat government. That's not going to happen. The only alternative is the Labour government. Why did you and the Labour Party fight each other in mid-beds? There have never been any non-aggression pacts at all. I mean, there really haven't been any pacts. No, not pacts. But there have been quiet understanding that we will let you kind of, you're the best place to win this seat. We're not going to put in much effort. You're the best place to win that seat. We won't put in much effort. Well, and that's because under our first pass-the-post system, there's normally only two parties that can win a particular seat. There's normally a very clear challenger to the incumbent. And what we've seen in the last four by-elections of the Liberal Democrats have won, we were the key challengers in those seats. And we felt as though we were the key challengers in mid-bedvatures as well.

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Even though you'd come third?
Even though we'd come third,
because that happened in some of the by-elections as well.
You recall that amongst those four by-elections,
there were at least two seats where we had come from third
to win.
And it's because of the nature of the kind of seat that it was.
But clearly we found that in mid-bedvature in the end,
Labour campaigned very hard, particularly in the towns,
in places like sort of Flittick and Amthill.
And we were campaigning hard across the constituency.
But got a lot more support in the rural villages.
And that's ended up, you know,
there was healthy competition between, you know,
all three parties.
And you can see the results.
But if you want the Tories out at the next election,
doesn't it behave you?
I mean, I know there's not going to be any formal pact
between the Liberal Democrats and Labour.
But to kind of work out a way where you're kind of,
it's a nod and a wink and you say to one another,
right, okay, look,
your best place to win this one,
we'll stand back a bit and vice versa.
Don't you think that would be good?
I don't think we really need it.
So, you know, as you know,
the Liberal Democrats are in second place
to the Conservatives in around 80 seats around the country.
And for voters in those constituencies,
it's really clear to them who the key challenges are.
So by-elections are slightly different kettle of fish, right?
Because every political party
can throw everything at a particular seat.
But in a general election,
we're all fighting in lots of different places
across the country.
And we've said very clearly,
we're going to put our resources into targeting those seats
where we're in second place to the Conservatives
in those 80 seats around the country.
So I think voters can make their own minds up.
If they want to vote tactically,

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they can see who the key challenger is.

But sometimes people want to vote positively for a particular party or a particular candidate.

So we always run positive campaigns on issues around NHS, cost of living, etc.

So I don't think that the result in Mubevichit ultimately affects what we're going to be doing at the general election.

All I know is that our job in the Lib Dems is to really make sure that we are targeted in the places that we can really win and where we can win seats off the Conservative MPs.

Daisy Cooper, thank you so much.

Thank you.

And after the break,

we'll be talking to the Shadow Cabinet member, Peter Kyle.

And he was on the newsagents a few weeks ago with Emily, describing how furious he was with the Liberal Democrats and the way they had campaigned in mid-beds.

We'll see if he's still angry on a night of spectacular victory for Labour.

This is The Newsagents.

And sitting in the studio is, I think it's not unfair to say, a bleary-eyed Peter Kyle, Shadow Cabinet member, but who early on was tasked with masterminding the Mid-Bedfordshire campaign.

And Peter Kyle, how are you?

Well, I didn't go to bed last night.

I got three hours the night before that.

When I get stressed, I'm usually quite focused on the outside.

I come out with mouth ulcers,

which I've got mouth full of mouth ulcers at the moment as well,

which just shows that we just, not just me, but everyone else,

we just gave this campaign absolutely everything.

And then when we had the opportunity towards the end,

we seized it with both hands

and we just worked absolutely round the clock

and we gave it absolutely everything we could

when we had the opportunity right there at the end.

So I'm pretty worn out,

but I'm looking forward to a weekend of sleep now.

But presumably on cloud nine?

I'm completely over the moon. We all are.

There were lots of tears yesterday

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because we knew from the outset that this was possible, but we knew there was a very, very narrow window of opportunity and we could do it if we made no mistakes.

And thanks to the team, I mean, the Labour Party team is absolutely in next level to anything I've ever experienced in political campaigning before.

So you have all these individual, skilled people on digital, on print, on strategy, on field operations.

And we added up to more than some of our parts and that's where the magic happens in campaigning.

Everything had to be different in this.

This was a very unconventional by-election and I sensed it, we sensed it on day one.

And I think looking back, we were the only party that ran an unconventional campaign.

The Lib Dems were running their Somerset and Froome, their standard campaign.

To try to get a bandwagon running.

Well, it was just smash the Tories.

Smash, smash, smash, smash, crash, bang, wallop.

We're here, unsubtle, taking real licence with facts.

All that kind of stuff, just steam rolling

in a sense of incredible entitlement

that we're the Lib Dems, we're here, choose us, come to us.

Then you had the Tories that were all over the place for ages,

very low-key and then suddenly decided to kick in

with a Uxbridge-style campaign to find one single issue

and tell electors that's what this campaign is about.

But we did something that was unconventional

in that we started the campaign by just listening

and we detected in the first days of this campaign

that the Tory voted imploded

and residents there had decided to leave the Tories.

Therefore, what's the point of us going in

with a heavy attack on the Tories?

The Tories have done it for us.

So this campaign had to be about being the most magnetic

by having a candidate that was the most appealing

that reflected the values that they want

in their Member of Parliament

and setting about defining this incredible candidate

we have with Alasdair Strathen

and building a campaign, a local campaign on him

and then simultaneously using the national,

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the foundations that Keir has laid for the party
and it all just came together very, very well.
Look, a conventional news interview now goes like this,
which I say yes, but you didn't really increase the Labour vote.
All that happened was that the Tory vote collapsed.
I just kind of want to ask a slightly different question,
although address it by all means,
which is how can the campaigning like this in a by-election
have any significance beyond the by-election?
Well, there's two questions there.
The first is quite straightforward,
that a smart campaign knows what the end game will look like
by the time you get there.
Of course, the Tory vote would collapse.
We knew that. We had the data on it.
We knew which demographics had fled the Tories
in the biggest numbers.
We knew where they were going to
and we met them where they were going.
We didn't just say, come to us.
Let me just interrupt that thought for a moment.
We'll come back to the second point as well in a minute.
When polling closed last night at 10 o'clock,
had you got in your mind what you thought had happened
or is it now we're in the lap of the gods?
What text did you send Keir Starmer?
Firstly, any party could have done, seen
what was happening there as we did.
It's just smart politics and the other parties,
they're not operating in a smart way right now.
As of last night, the challenge was,
and I had lots of your colleagues calling me
and texting saying, what's it like?
Tell us, because everybody wants to know
the future before the future happens.
Quite often in these situations, you can do it
because our data is so robust and we can predict it
and we pretty much know where it's going into account.
We'll have an inkling of where it's going.
Yesterday, I come back to it,
it was an unconventional by-election.
So, Tamworth was broadly Tory labour fight.
Rutherglen was SNP labour fight,
but this yesterday was, in our minds,

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was a Tory labour fight, but we also knew that there was a very, very popular local independent candidate that would keep his deposit and actually probably do quite well. In one independent poll, had 19% of the vote. Reform were running, they would probably keep their deposit. They had another party of the alt-right running, they would probably keep their deposit and then the Lib Dems came crash-bang-wallop into the middle of this, saying that, you know, we're here, we're going to do really well, this is a seat for us, Labour stand aside, voters come to us, we're here. Are you really pissed off with the Liberal Democrats? Can I come back to that after this? So, we went into last night thinking, there's no reference points here. There's never been an election campaign in mid-Bedfordshire, the Tories never did it. So, they did their two mail-outs, they never door-knocked, there's never been canvassing there, there's no data there. When we arrived, there was a tiny amount of data for us, we had to build it all up. So, there's no reference points that we could go back to to see if this happens, this is what it means because we've had history there. There was also multi-parties operating there, it wasn't a straight battle between two parties. So, there was so much uncertainty. We knew we had the highest vote share, but we didn't know where the rest of it would all fall and we didn't know exactly where the turnout would be because there's no reference points, we didn't know what turnout was going to be like in a by-election in a seat like this. So, presumably, last night, 10 o'clock, polls closed, what, does Kirsten Armand message you? I mean, tell us what happened. Yeah, of course he did. Of course he texted. He texted how it's going, I've got the text here and then my reply was, I'm anxious. I then go on and just talk him through

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what all of our data says.

I talk about why the data is so much uncertainty in the data because of the number of different people standing who could credibly keep their deposit.

And then I just say that there is a very credible pathway to us winning, but there is a lot of uncertainty.

The second I have more, I'll let you know, providing I've not bitten my fingers off to the bone by then.

And what does Kirsten say?

He's grateful for the update.

So, look, he is, you know, he...

Why do you say he's grateful for the update?

Is he saying, is it expletive ridden or what?

No, no, no, no, no, no, no, no, no, no, no, no, no, no, no.

That's not Kier.

Kier is Kier.

You know, Kier isn't a fundamentally different person in private as he is in public.

He's down the line.

He wants updates.

He wants the unvarnished truth.

He's a warm person and he likes it being spoken to him in human terms, not just sort of dry facts all the time.

Look, he was very helpful and we had several exchanges yesterday when we saw how things were going, but it was a very unpredictable evening.

And then suddenly the numbers started to come in our direction and I can't tell you the sense of relief.

And then we had to keep it buttoned down as a team very, very tightly because it could go anywhere.

The count was a very unpredictable evening.

So, you talked a minute ago about the Liberal Democrats crash bang walloping.

And I remember you coming on the podcast and I was away, but I remember listening to it vividly and exactly where I was when I heard the interview you did with Emily and you really went after the Liberal Democrats and the way that they were campaigning and saying how personal they'd made it and how unpleasant it was.

You seem really pissed off with the Liberal Democrats.

There's a few things that I've been reflecting on from this.

The first one to be really clear is

I have never suggested that the Lib Dems shouldn't have stood in this election.

Let me just explain how we approached this.

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When Keir called me and asked me to go to mid-bevature and just sense check what was going on there and to go up with a team of Labour staffers to just get a sense we all went out and just started by listening to residents. We came back, got data for what we were experiencing. The result was the Tory vote is collapsing. We don't quite know where it's going to go but we were really certain they were open, very certain they were open for a conversation with Labour. They wanted to explore Labour first. Now I made the decision in that very, very first week which we all unanimously agreed with that if the Tories were to lose it would be to either Labour or the Lib Dems. So what we will not do is take out the Lib Dems. We won't attack them, we won't be personal, we won't even name them. In our literature, our online activity or anything we allow our activists to say. We went on week after week after week doing exactly the same. In fact, from the start of the campaign at the beginning of June to the polling day last night, we never mentioned the Lib Dems candidate or the Lib Dems at all in any of our online or physical activities. The Lib Dems came in because simply if they had emerged as the logical party to fight this battle we would have turned it off in a heartbeat. We're not in the business of wasting Labour Party members' money. I'm not in the business of spending so much time away from the place I love living in. I love living in Hove. I didn't do it because I don't like living in Hove. We did it because that community told us they wanted to explore Labour. And then the Lib Dems came in, they didn't listen. They did start collecting data presumably and our data is incredible, probably the most sophisticated of any party these days. They would have been seeing something along the lines of what we were seeing which was most people were saying Labour, a few people saying Lib Dem. But they immediately launched a viscerally personal attack against our candidate, Alastair Strathen. They started lying about him and it went on for week after week. I came to do this interview with you guys in August. There had been three months of this before I said anything. It came to the point where I had to as the political lead for this campaign I had to show our candidate, Alastair, that I was going to protect him, that I was going to stick up for him which is why I came and did the interview here just so I could blow the whistle and let him and the campaign

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and all the volunteers that were experiencing this filth coming from that party day after day just to show them that I was going to stick up for them. So in answer to my question about whether you were pissed off with the Liberal Democrats the answer is yes.

Why would I not be angry about that?

The other thing was it was politically stupid because that was a community that had experienced the worst of politics.

The worst of politics.

That's why they had fled the Tories, not just Nadine Dorris.

They had seen what was going on with the government and it wasn't good enough.

It didn't match their standards as a community.

So why go piling in with something which matched the negatives that they had experienced with the Tories?

Lying, sneering, innuendo, attack, attack, attack.

No conversation, just absolute, pure isle, visceral, unrelenting negativity and I couldn't understand it

but what I couldn't understand is why they were doing it to us.

I could understand on their terms why they do it against the Tories

but even up to the eve of poll yesterday

almost all of their activity was aimed at Labour and not anywhere else.

What sort of lies are you talking?

They said that he wasn't living in the constituency

for months after he was living, months after he was living in the constituency.

So Alastair, our great candidate, was living in Shefford

and every morning he was getting leaflets through his own door

telling him he didn't live there, week after week.

We have to send a legal note to them to say

you've got to stop doing this or we'll take action.

So of course they stop it.

At least they're still using innuendo and sneering, you know,

Labour's London candidate and shipped in from London but now living here

but at least it's honest.

At least it's truthful to residents about what they're saying

and I'm fine with that, absolutely fine with it.

Do you hope that you can become the general election?

There will be a little more understanding, maturity.

Has Zed Davy spoken to Keir Starmer about it?

I don't know, I just...

Labour Party didn't need to go into a dark room in Westminster

to know that us spending a lot of money in Somerton and Froom

would have been a waste of money.

It was smart politics for us to do what we did there.

The Lib Dems acted in mid-Bevichure, it was dumb politics

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and I don't think this country needs any more dumb politics,
I think we've had enough of it
and I'm starting to wonder what the hell the purpose of the Lib Dems are now
because look, take them on their own terms.
They came in at the start of this and said
this is a Lib Dem patch, only the Lib Dems can win here.
Labour can't win here, it's rural.
Labour can't win here, they've never won here before,
they didn't even win it in 1997.
This is the sort of place that the Lib Dems win
and they got a headline out of it because the media went along with this.
We always knew because the data was distinctly telling us
it was a labor-tory battle, so we ignored it.
But they went on doing that and then right to the very end,
so now I ask myself, what's the purpose?
They've built up the expectations that only they can do this.
They have now blown their reason for being.
So I think a lot of people in some of these parts of the country,
in Yorkshire and other parts of the country and in the south-east, south-west,
that would traditionally go to the Lib Dems
because they don't think the Labour Party can win.
This isn't about Labour Party, this is about voters now looking at mid-Bedfordshire
and saying what's the point of the Lib Dems, do we need a gateway political drug?
OK, so let's go wider.
What lessons do we draw? Does this have any significance for the general election?
As you sit here now, Peter Kyle, can you say Labour are on course
for a general election victory and a clear majority in the House of Commons?
I would say that a pathway to that happening is clearly one of the options before us
if we choose to stay the course and deliver it.
If I could just tell you what I think fundamentally happened in this election
that delivered the outcome it did and I can tell it with a story
because I went into a village in mid-Bedfordshire.
I saw a village hut, a wooden hut, community hut centre in one of these villages.
I walked in and there on the wall was a set of murals,
the kids in the local village, a traditional English village,
snatch cottages, pub, green, it really was the most beautiful place
and it is the most beautiful place and new build as well.
I went in and one of the murals on the wall is British values,
as done by children in this local village.
Those traditional values all around the outside are pictures of the royal family
going from the king to George V, patriotism, institutions
and all in the middle were the values and names,
so the first one at the top, law and order, understanding that rules matter.
The next one going along, be kind.

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The next one, understand the difference between right and wrong.
The next one, include everyone with a little pride flag.
I looked at this and I was stunned because there in this children's mural was the most sophisticated analysis of our political landscape as a country right now because those values were once associated with the governing party, the conservative party and probably all the way through the history of that community voting Tory, it was recognizably aligned with Tory values. But rule of law, we've got governments, broken international law and domestic law. Standards, understanding the difference between right and wrong. Tell the truth was one of the values.
We just had Boris Johnson being inclusive with a pride flag.
We've just seen Tuvala Braverman, a government minister, launching a war against these values. So the Tory party has ripped itself away from that and what's happened instead? The Labour Party with Kier Stammer, aligning itself almost perfectly with them. On the one hand, law and order.
On the other, the institutions and patriotism.
And then using a language which unites and is inclusive.
All of those values are right there.
So the Labour Party, I would argue, has aligned itself with what most people in Britain would associate with British values and that is the fundamental reason why we won and were able to win in mid-Bevichir.
And that answers your broader question that I think that is what will unlock some shocking victories for Labour, potentially.
Because in parts of the country which don't align themselves with Tory values anymore, I think they'll see a very, very comfortable fit with the Labour Party if we get local campaigns and the national campaign right.
Apologists are saying it could be 530 Labour seats at the next election on the basis of what happened last night?
I think there are a credible pathway to some really quite outlandish, ambitious settlements and just how far we can capitalise on that and just how far the Tories will allow us to capitalise on that is yet to be seen.
Because whilst Kier Stammer and the Labour Party are putting in all of the hard work to prepare a programme for government, the Conservative Party is putting in all of the hard work to prepare for opposition.
Peter Kyle, thank you so much.
Thank you for having me again.
Well, since recording that interview with Peter Kyle, we have gone back to the Liberal Democrats to put to them what he said to us and we have a statement from the Liberal Democrats and let me read it to you without any varnish on it at all.
They did not take legal action, we did not tell any lies.
Peter, go and have a long, hot bath an early night and then hopefully you can enjoy your result.
Well, let's get a Conservative perspective on last night's by-election results.

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Robin Walker, who is the Tory MP for Worcester, had been campaigning in mid-beds.

What on earth went wrong when you have a majority of 25,000?

There's never been a by-election like it.

Well, there have, of course, been a number of other by-elections with big swings over the years, but this was a tough night undoubtedly.

A lot of our voters stayed at home having been knocking on doors.

A lot of people were angry about the way in which their last MP had left and upset and understandably crossed saying they wouldn't vote for us this time.

But actually an awful lot of people were also saying that in a general election they might behave differently and I think it is something that we have to listen to for concern and the feedback that's there,

but also recognise that by-elections are exceptional things and in this case it didn't go the way we wanted.

I think we had an excellent candidate and a strong ground campaign from what I saw, but I think understandably many people in mid-beds were incredibly frustrated about the fact this by-election was happening in the first place.

So it's Nadine's fault?

No, I'm not saying that entirely, but of course we've got to recognise the circumstances in which it arose

and I think what is striking is at the same time on the same day we've had a by-election in two local council seats in Worcester which is a seat that Labour need to win to win another general election in which they have come third and fourth.

I think what it reflects is there's not some great enthusiasm for Labour at this point, excitement about them coming in.

What there is is a mood of frustration and I think we have to engage with that.

We have to show that we have solutions.

I do think the Prime Minister's priorities and particularly the focus on tackling inflation are the right ones, but I think we have to show delivery on those in order to win people back and show competence as a party.

Can I gently suggest that maybe that is a tad complacent

when you've had two of the biggest by-election wins by Labour since God knows when?

I accept that these wins are a concern for the party.

We need to engage and we need to listen,

but I think there are an awful lot of voters out there who are prepared to engage with us and not excited about the prospect of a Labour government

and I think that's what I've been hearing from businesses I've been engaging with today.

I think it's what's reflected in wider voting patterns

and the fact that the last time we saw a swing of this scale was actually only about a year ago, but it was to the Liberal Democrats rather than to Labour in the Cheshire by-election

doesn't suggest that we're in a 97-style situation, I have to say.

You're standing down at the next election, aren't you, in Worcester?

I am and I think we have an excellent candidate in Mark Bayless

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who will be well placed to fight the seat,
but I think it is something that actually what we have seen locally
is a big shift in voting patterns,
but it's one that is primarily benefiting other parties
like the Greens and the Liberal Democrats rather than necessarily the Labour Party
and the Conservatives remain in first or second place
in almost every council seat in the city,
so that is something that I think gives us a good platform on which to build
and to win back seats next year at the local elections
and that certainly something I'll be supporting the Association in doing.
Sure, I just wonder whether if you had total confidence
that the Conservatives were going to hold the seat of Worcester,
you might have been fighting the election again.
I set out my reasoning on that a year ago.
It is primarily because of family reasons that I'm stepping down
and the reality is having fought five general elections.
I think I've done my piece here,
but I think it is certainly something that I think the party is in a strong place
to be able to win in a place like Worcester,
to be able to win back the council and to be able to put up a strong candidate.
Clearly, we need to listen to the concerns that have been raised
in these by-elections and in others recently
and show real delivery for the public in order to do that.
There's absolutely no room for any complacency in that respect.
What I don't buy, though, is this narrative
that people are wildly enthusiastic about a Labour alternative,
which the turnout figures from these recent by-elections
just don't suggest that they are.
Robin Walker, grateful to you.
Thanks very much for being with the newsagents today.
Thank you.
This is The Newsagents.
Before we go, on the other side of the glass,
in the studio where I'm sitting right now, are my production team,
and they've told me they've got a clip that they want to end the podcast with,
and they won't tell me what it is, the bastards.
It's day one of the honeymoon, arrived in Colorado yesterday,
and I spent the evening watching the by-election results.
You know, in a way, I don't think that there's a better way to get your honeymoon started.
There's drama, there's excitement, thrills, spills.
Does that make sense? I probably shouldn't say that.
Anyway, my wife, very patient lady, fell asleep and I watched the by-election results,
and I know, John, that you're all alone
and you're not used to being alone on a Friday.

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You need someone to hold your hand,
so I thought I would just intrude on soap or style.
Send a few quick thoughts from the Mountain State,
which is actually the perfect place, the Centennial State, I should say,
the actual perfect place on Mountain Time to watch a British by-election from,
can be asleep, you know, by half ten. Absolutely fantastic.
A few thoughts. This is a seismic result for the late of the party
and for the conservative party, and it basically reaffirms, of course it would,
what we were saying on the news agents in the aftermath of the Selby and Uxbridge by-election
results,
which is that far, far too much attention was paid in the Westminster village by the press,
and frankly, as a spec by conservative MPs,
and certainly by Downing Street, though, you can understand that more to Uxbridge
and not nearly enough to Selby.
Uxbridge, as we said at the time, was sui generis.
It was a particular set of circumstances which led to that result.
Everyone should have been looking at Selby, which was a massive swing to the Labour Party,
and they should have been looking before that, Summerton and Froome,
which was a huge result for the Lib Dems.
And what you can see from these results, and I think what you're probably seeing in terms of
conservative MPs,
waking up this morning, looking at these results, is a long, sober intake of breath,
which is not something I'm going to be doing a lot of on this honeymoon,
but a long, sober intake of breath, thinking, what on earth do we do now?
Because they might just be realising, waking up to the fact that something that has been
underpriced in Westminster
for some time has been the possibility of a conservative wipeout.
Not Labour just sneaking in, not a hung parliament, but all of the circumstances,
the volatility that we've seen in the electorate time and time again in recent years,
coming together to produce a wipeout for the Conservative Party on 1997 levels,
or even, according on the basis of these results and some of the results we saw in the local elections,
exceeding 1997 levels.
Will that cause volatility in the Conservative Party? Maybe.
But then again, it's not as if they've got an alternative strategy.
It's not as if they've got an alternative leader waiting in the wings.
They are just going to, I suspect, although you can't be sure, suck it and see,
and wait and hope that something turns up.
And again, to something reaffirming we've been saying on the newsagents for a while,
the likelihood of a December 2024 or even a January 2025 general election
is just going up and up and up all the time.
One other thing as well, this also in a way that you could never have anticipated a few years ago,
shows that Brexit has lost all of its salience, or nearly all of its salience,
in a way we would never have anticipated in 2019 or even in 2021 after the Hartlepool by-election,
which the Conservatives won against Labour in the middle of the parliament.

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You would never have thought then that the realignment that looked like it was going to be permanent

would apparently not only be stopped in its tracks, but reversed.

These results, coupled with the local election results, seem to show the Conservative Party undoing, or having undone, years and years worth of realignment in places like the Westminsterans and the North, which preceded Brexit and which accelerated after Brexit as well.

Anyway, my wife's waking up, so I should probably...

Hi, darling. I should probably leave it at that.

John, don't worry. Emily's back on Monday. You're not going to be alone for much longer.

I'm going to bring back those cowboy boots that you requested. See you very soon.

I have two thoughts having had that sprung upon me by the producers.

One, Goodell, we had all that bloody well covered.

All the points you've just long-windedly made there we did in the podcast.

And my second thought is this.

Who would want to be married to Lewis Goodall, that he does this on his honeymoon?

I would have thought maybe there were one or two better things to be doing.

See you next week.

you