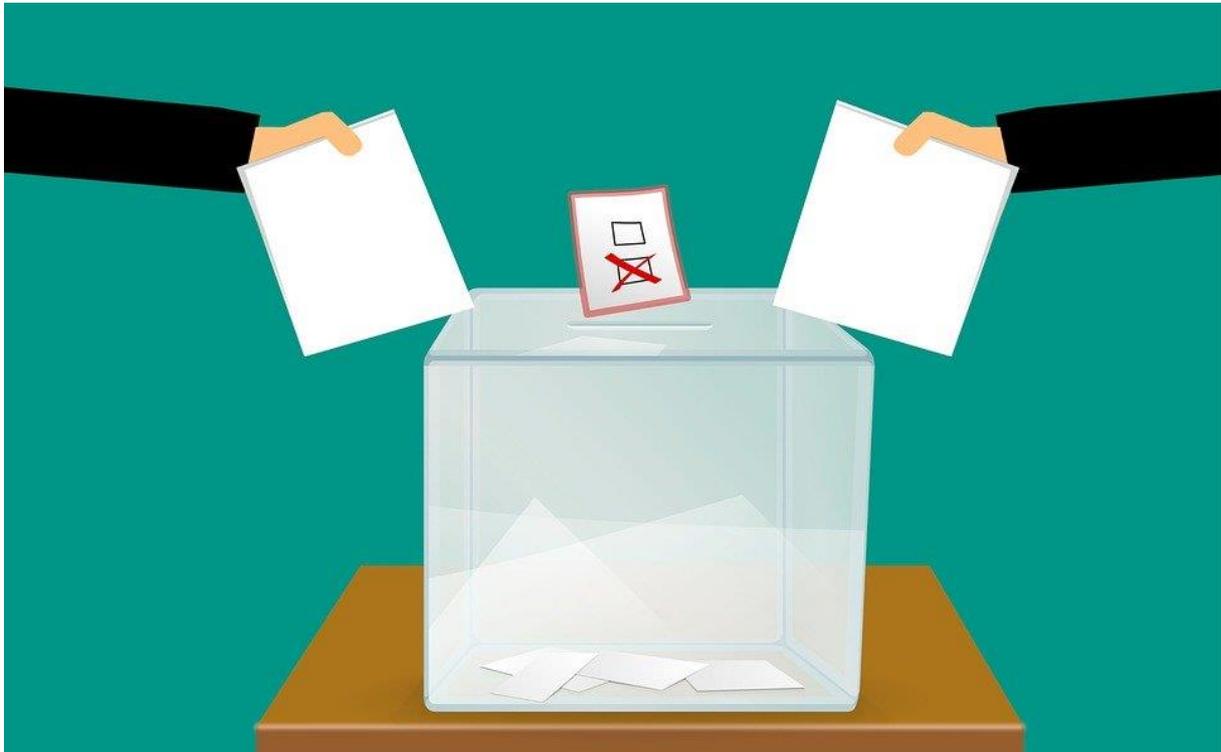


On election day I'll be voting on values, not policies



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4 December

What we most lack in politics is not good ideas or clever analysis. If anything can break the deadlock it will be the attitudes and values of our politicians, not their policies

There is also extreme emotion, as the Brexit debate continues to rage in our homes and in parliament. And there are extremes of opinion on many issues, from immigration to healthcare to counter-terrorism.

What are the qualities our politicians will need to navigate these extremes of uncertainty, emotion and opinion? As we go to the polls next week what should we be looking for to help us cast our vote?

We are swimming through uncharted waters. No country has ever left the EU before. How can we know the impact on our finances, our institutions, or our positioning on the world stage? In the face of this uncertainty what our politicians most need is humility.

What would impress me would be a politician who acknowledged that we do not know whether we are better off inside or outside the European Union.

I would vote for someone willing to admit that they don't yet know the answer to the Brexit conundrum. I would be inspired by a politician who acted as if their own opinion was just one piece of the jigsaw – somebody open to finding solutions collaboratively, even across party divides.

In the face of polarised opinion, the quality we need more of is respect. I would love to see politicians listening to members of the opposition party because they may have something useful to say.

Imagine if an MP on one side of the room invited an MP on the other to say more, in a sincere attempt to gain a new perspective. What would happen to the quality of the debate if our politicians had more courageous conversations, and spoke to one another with this kind of respect?

As for handling extremes of emotion, what would help is more compassion. When faced with an aggressive outburst, of the kind we regularly see in Brexit debates, the typical response is a knee-jerk reaction of the fight or flight kind: hitting back with equally-charged emotion or shutting down the channels of communication.

What if our politicians were mature enough to see emotion as an expression of longing or hurt, and to relate to that emotion as something they have experienced in their own life? It may sound absurd to expect this of a politician, but talk of compassion is becoming mainstream in business, education and society. Why should it not take root in politics as well?

Cultivating these qualities of humility, respect and compassion is no easy task – especially when the prevailing political culture is so opposed. But cultural change is possible.

The business environment is starting to soften around the edges, with the emergence of training programmes focused on listening skills, emotional intelligence and conflict resolution. Schools are paying more attention to their pupils' personal qualities and success beyond exam results.

Peer mediation, which allows young people in conflict to move beyond their differences, is offered in many schools. And as a society we are learning to respond to mental health issues with compassion and respect.

If any of the political parties were to devote their energies to bringing about this kind of change in the world of politics they would almost certainly get my vote.

But perhaps it's too early to expect that. Until we reach that stage, I will be voting for the candidate that best embodies the qualities of humility, respect and compassion. And happily, this is far easier to assess than manifesto promises that can so easily be broken.