



COMMENT

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## Civility in politics should not be too much to hope for

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As many of us wrestle with the question of where to place our cross on Thursday, perhaps we need to approach our choice differently.

Suppose we believe that the biggest concern is how we do politics, rather than any particular policy. Suppose we wish to see reform of public discourse and a return of civility. Suppose we see our politicians as bellwethers of how society discusses important matters. Suppose we think that civil discourse in parliament may be the essential precondition to a more mature consideration of what really matters, such as climate change, automation of jobs and mass migration, in addition to constitutional issues.

What sort of people do we wish to see and hear considering these and other difficult matters? How would we wish them to conduct themselves, and behave towards each other and others, including us, the electorate? We probably know the answers.

Might the answers give us relevant benchmarks for deciding how to vote? Suppose we vote for the candidates who show most respect towards people with different views. What about those who go so far as to accept that nobody has a monopoly on the right way to do things?

What about the candidate who listens to other views and tries to answer questions directly and frankly? What about a candidate who exhibits humility and restraint? Would we give more credence to a candidate who avoids using inflammatory language and refuses to engage in personally derogatory remarks?

What about the candidate who behaves as we would expect other people in our workplace to behave towards us? Would we give weight to someone who looks to find common ground where possible on the really difficult issues, and who is transparent about why he or she differs on certain matters? Should we applaud a candidate who explains that binary choices don't reflect the complicated, volatile, ambiguous realities we face?

If thousands of us opted to use these criteria to decide our votes, might that affect the outcome? It's possible, especially if we declare our intentions. There are those who will say

that this is naive. It's politics and the present state of things is just how we do it. I for one don't accept that.

There is precious little evidence to suggest that the present state of things is a credible way to continue. Indeed, it is hard to be confident about the future unless we embrace dignity and civility in political discourse in this country. It can hardly make things worse than they are. It might just make things better.

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