

Be political, if only by crossing a box

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Social work is a political vocation. It intercedes and operates, usually, either inside the institutions through which the state works with families and individuals, or in community organisations working between those institutions and the community. Any social professional role is, by nature, a political role, because politics is concerned with shaping, building and developing society.

This is not the same as saying social work is, or should be, party political. I know social workers who sit at a wide range of points across the political spectrum, and support different parties, and the same is true for the student population. Plenty of both groups are also floating voters, who vary their voting intentions between elections, or who vote for a local candidate even if they belong to a party that they would normally not support, or vice versa, because of that individual's record.

So this is not in any way an appeal to vote a particular way, but it is a request - a plea – to use your vote, and to be part of the process.

This May 3rd, a large number of council elections across England, will be taking place, including all seats on Newcastle council, and parts of others around our region. For those who don't know, a council election takes place to elect people to the political governing body of the local authority. It is different from a general election, where we elect members of parliament, or for devolved assemblies in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

The General election of 2017 was an excellent example of the importance of voting. The result was a hung parliament – where no party had an overall majority and therefore the ability to govern completely on their own. However, the result was incredibly close. On rough calculations, had around 400 people in 8-10 specific constituencies voted differently, the Conservatives would have had a slim majority. If on the other hand about 900 people in 8-10 other particular constituencies voted differently, the Conservatives would have not been able to have a majority even with the support of the DUP, as they presently have. In North-East Fife in the 2017 election, the victor won by 2 votes, and in one of the Northumberland county council seats, two candidates received the same number of votes, and the result had to be decided by drawing straws. The result meant that no one party had total control of the council. If one person in that seat had voted differently, it would have changed the governing arrangements of a whole county.

These examples are still rare, granted, but they are becoming more common. In 2010, it wouldn't have taken a vast number of people in particular seats voting differently one way to have had a Conservative-only government, or another way to have made a Labour-Liberal coalition numerically possible. There are more marginal seats – that is seats where the incumbent MP or councillor only won by a small percentage of the vote. If you don't like any of the options, see if there's one you definitely don't want, and vote for whoever you think might defeat them.

How you vote is of course entirely your business, but whatever your political views, it is important to use your democratic right and turn up to vote if you are at all able. Government websites can tell you how to register and how to vote on the day. Please don't stick your head in the sand.