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# Paula Keaveney’s Political Week – Episode 5

**Paula:**

**[00:00:00,410]** Another week in politics. A lot has happened.I'm back here to talk to politics, lecturer at Edge Hill University politics with her shrewd eye on Westminster and all that goes on around there.

**[00:00:16,490]** Now, we both in agreement that quite a lot has been going on and quite a lot continues to go on.So it's very difficult to be specific about anything at the moment.So we thought we'd have a look at initially the local landscape and the forthcoming

**[00:00:35,870]** by election in West Lancashire after the stepping down of Rosie Cooper,who's been an MP for that number of years, I think. So Paula took us through the West

**[00:00:48,230]** Lancashire by election and when it will be part of the history and what it might tell us about the current political landscape. Yes. So by elections are funny beasts because in a general election all of the campaigning spread around the country.

**[00:01:07,310]** So we might experience some political campaigning, but it won't be that intensive.What happens in a by election is political activists from all parties just focus on a relatively small area.

**[00:01:19,760]** So people tend to come into areas to assist their campaigns.So that makes it all a lot more intense. And it means that for that period of time, journalists are focussing just on that particular area.

**[00:01:33,020]** So a by election is a bit like an opinion poll examining the standing of the different parties at the time. There is still a local campaign and there are still local candidates,but the opinion poll nature of a by election means that many more issues are considered than just what's best for that area.

**[00:01:55,250]** So we have one of these coming up with West Lancashire. It's just because the MP, Rosie Cooper has said she's standing down.So what happens in that case is her party, which is the Labour Party, gets to say when that byelection will take place.

**[00:02:11,510]** And they do that via a process called moving the writ that happens in in the House of Commons.And it's a sort of fairly formal thing. And then it's a campaign, it's normally about three weeks up to the voting.

**[00:02:24,380]** And what we will be looking for in this case is the share of the vote.The different parties get it. So does the Labour Party share of the vote go up?Does the Conservative share of the vote go down? If it goes down, how much does it go down?

**[00:02:39,350]** What does this tell us about Keir Starmer standing?What does this tell us about the standing of the Conservative Party and if there are extra parties entering the fray?So quite often there are locally based parties and in West Lancashire we have at least one of these called our West Lancashire.

**[00:02:58,190]** The local party enters the fray. Who do they take votes off and what is the significance of that?Okay, so I think you have the Tories. Did they get about 30 odd percent last time round?

**[00:03:10,430]** Yes. So this was the 2019 election. So the Conservatives did a lot better than expected in many parts of the country in 2019.Virtually no shift in support for the Conservatives in West Lancashire back in 2019.

**[00:03:25,250]** So they don't have a Boris bounce to fall away from.But it will still be interesting to see if that share of the vote shrinks away or grows.I've got to say, I can't actually see that share of the vote increasing spot.

**[00:03:40,400]** Party managers will be looking at the share of the vote because this is the first opinionpoll of this sort that we've had since the Conservatives top leadership contest.So since Boris went. So this is the first chance really to say, okay, real votes in real ballot boxes.

**[00:04:00,350]** What are people saying? Is there a figure that would have the Tory Party's alarm bells ringing, you know, if it went below us?What happened in 2019 is that Labour won and the Conservatives comes and then there's quite a big gap between them and the other parties.

**[00:04:19,760]** So the Conservatives will be hoping to hang onto second place and if the other party's vote share doesn't increase, that is possible.But if I was a Conservative Party manager, I wouldn't be very worried about anything, any slippage down to 20% or lower,

**[00:04:39,290]** because that is sort of 20% level of support that comes dangerous across the country. So I would be looking at that quite carefully. Talking of the country, the polls suggest a big gap right now between Labour and the Tory Party historically.

**[00:04:57,680]** Is that is that gap? At The Narrows when it gets this big.So we expect the opposition to be ahead in the opinion polls at this stage in a parliament.That's normal.

**[00:05:08,170]** We don't normally expect it to be this far ahead and it is hard to see how this poll could completely narrow to put the conservatives ahead again.I mean, for me, what this feels like is the last couple of years of the John Major government in the run up to 1994 and a lot of the

**[00:05:27,700]** factors that were present then are present now on those factors are the sort of loss of trust in the government,a sense that the government couldn't manage the economy properly.

**[00:05:38,230]** So remember, we dropped out of the exchange rate mechanism quite dramatically, a series of scandals at the time.We've we've also had a series of scandals around some Conservative MP now and the opposition party gaining a reputation for being competent.

**[00:05:54,790]** So to me, this looks very similar and I can't actually see the Conservatives bringing that opinion poll rating back up.Now, they can still win an election going in with an opinion poll deficit because in real elections,

**[00:06:12,910 --> 00:06:21,010]** things happen that are not reported in opinion polls. But with this particular large gap, the prospect of winning an election is zero.Okay, that's pretty strong statement there. And so are there any other examples of historical landslides?

**[00:06:30,970]** Yes. So landslides don't come that frequently.We normally have small changes in votes. But, you know, if we look back to 1979 and even more 1983, you know,Labour lost to the Democrat Thatcher and the Conservatives and then lost even more heavily in 1983.

**[00:06:52,420]** But if we go back even further in history, you know,1906 is a very particularly special year for liberals because that was the year of the great Liberal landslide and the Conservatives were swept away.

**[00:07:05,950]** I mean, there was again some very surprising election victories there.It's when you have a big defeat, but in your party you actually do a lot of work thinking about direction and the way your party scene.

**[00:07:20,470]** So, you know, this there's some argument to say the heavy loss actually helps in the long run because aheavy loss persuade you to think about the direction of your party and just work on it.

**[00:07:33,400]** They might. A loss just makes you think, Oh, all we need to do is work a bit harder next time.And so what we see is particularly 1993, the Labour lost a lot of thinking about the direction of the party.

**[00:07:48,520]** 1997 the Conservatives lost a lot of thinking about the direction of the party.So actually maybe one of the best things that could happen to the Conservative Party would be quite a major loss,which would force them to do some of the internal thinking and rebuilding.

**[00:08:04,660]** That's just not possible when you're trying to run a government.Yes, sometimes governments do run their course firmly when the time for a change message is one of the strongest messages in politics. And sometimes it doesn't matter what you do and it doesn't matter what you say,

**[00:08:23,770]** the sense that, you know you're tired and it's time for change just becomes too, too great.And one of the reasons I think that John Major surprisingly won the 1992 electionwas that he had recently replaced Margaret Thatcher and done some policy changes.

**[00:08:42,280]** So a section of the electorate thought, oh, we've already had the change.You know, this is this is not the old government. This is something new. And he was able to trade off this. But, you know, we see it everywhere.

**[00:08:54,880]** We see it in American politics, too. This time for a change, message just becomes too strong.And it's like a tsunami is coming at you.

And, you know, maybe you could put your umbrella up.

**[00:09:10,240** You know, maybe you could do your coach up a bit. You could take a few steps back.But you know what? The tsunami is just going to hit you anyway because it's time for a change.

**[00:09:17,980]** Yeah, we've been deliberately skirting around what is actually happening right here,right now in politics, because it seems to shift by the by the minute. But I guess the time for a change feeling in the in the country might be coming from the

**[00:09:37,120]** fact that this seems to be maybe a government that's lost control and is fragmenting.I think it's been pulled in many different directions.You know, I always like to ask you for some predictions.

**[00:09:52,450]** Have we got have you got any predictions for us poll? Have you got anything to say about who will be leading the Tory party?At the next election. Thus absolutely impossible to say at this stage when it would clearly list France.

**[00:10:07,090]** In her interview was asked if she would lead the Conservatives into the next election and said yes,but frankly, there was no other role so she could have given.

**[00:10:15,790]** So we have to put that answer to one side. It's really hard to say, and it could go in so many different ways.And as you say, the situation is changing day by day that somebody who's up now as we speak may well be down even a couple of days time.

**[00:10:34,780 --> 00:10:42,840]** So hard to say. I mean, what I will say about my job is it's on the list of jobs that I would rather don't have.It's not one because whoever does that has got a really difficult time ahead of

**[00:10:47,710]** them because they have to deal with all the problems that have just been created.Plus, going into an election where confidence in them will be low and people will have this time for change, then keep going on.

**[00:11:01,660]** So there may be people who really, really want to be leader of the conservatives, but if offered,the chance now would sit it out because taking the job on now could be a poisoned chalice waiting for the next opportunity,

**[00:11:19,360]** particularly if you're a young candidate. Maybe the best thing to do.

So I'll bet there are several people thinking, Do you know what?I'm going to give it a miss this time, because the opportunity is coming again in a few years and that will be a better time to start.

**[00:11:34,750]** I remember when Tony Blair was in number ten, the Tories went through a few leaders until they got to Cameron and didn't like.So John Major stood down and William Hague took over and William Hague introduced some reforms in the party.

**[00:11:49,960]** He tried to do a sort of young, fresh approach which didn't work,and he got sort of driven back onto campaigning around issues such as saving the pound, which were never really big issues.

**[00:12:03,190]** He lost an election, stood down. Iain Duncan Smith is elected.He does very badly as Opposition Leader and he's effectively forced out.Michael Howard replaces him. So there's no election then because Michael Howard's effective and the only person who takes them up to

**[00:12:19,600]** 2005 loses the election stays around for a while in order for that to be a proper leadership contest.And that is when David Cameron is elected. Michael Howard was a supporter of David Cameron.

**[00:12:33,970]** In fact, David Cameron was an adviser to Michael Rowland at one time and it's often said that MichaelHoward stuck around a bit in order to allow David Cameron to get a head of steam up.

**[00:12:45,130]** So at least that sounds like they had some kind of plan. Maybe they need to go back reset.Just finally, if you are in Keir Starmer's camp, you know, how would you be feeling right now?

**[00:12:55,840]** I mean, like you said, it's an opportunity for the Labour Party, but it's also quite difficult time to come to take over out of thought.Yes. So I mean, Keir Starmer will be hoping to effectively get out of the way while the Conservatives make a lot of mistakes.

**[00:13:13,000]** So actually what he wants is the media trained on the Conservatives messing things up.So there will be times when he doesn't say anything in order to allow that focus to develop.But [INAUDIBLE] also need to be stressing competence, stressing a steadiness, stressing economic responsibility.

**[00:13:32,860]** So trying to make a contrast with the ones that the conservatives are seeing now and just,well, how important is the job of opposition leader at this stage is to white.You know, he's waiting for the election, getting ready, making sure the ducks in a row place.

**[00:13:50,000]** It's waiting, isn't it? Because actually he doesn't control the timing.He just has to make sure he's ready whenever that comes. You know, I'm going to ask you, you, Paula, when is that time going to come?

**[00:14:03,380]** I can't see any conservative leader at the moment calling an election that would be spectacularly unified.And I understand why all the opposition parties are saying, let's have an election, of course.That's what they would say. But some of them are saying it in the show and certain knowledge that it won't happen.

**[00:14:25,190]** So when will it be? Let's say somebody takes over from Liz Truss.That person will probably want to go full time and have a good two years to repair things.Okay. Two years. But in the meantime, there is a by election.

**[00:14:42,020]** And when did you say that was going to be? NovemberSo it's up to the is up to the Labour Party to decide what it's going to be in the hasn't set the date yet.

**[00:14:50,750]** Lots of the speculation is around late November.So we will see. I mean, elections in bad weather are not all that pleasant.But don't forget, the last general election was in December.

**[00:15:04,910 --> 00:15:08,180]** So people are used to going out in the dark to vote.So Labour will be trying to time that for the best time for them.Okay. These two being in the dark as well when they've I should think.

**[00:15:18,740 --> 00:15:29,240]** Okay, Paula, that is another incredibly shrewd and astute and insightful look at the week in politics.I don't want to think what next week is going to break, but thanks again.

**[00:15:33,700 --> 00:15:34,270]** Thank you.