

Neutrality, Politics and Football

Shôn Ellerton, June 2, 2020

Walking into a Glaswegian bar half dressed in green and blue could be problematic!



Whilst working in an engineering consultancy, I befriended a fellow engineer from Edinburgh by the name of Keith, a devout football (soccer) fanatic and a loyal Hearts (Heart of Midlothian) supporter. Whilst drinking many a pint at the local pub after work, he often told amusing little stories of two fiercely competitive Glasgow-based football teams, the Rangers (the blue ones) and the Celtics (the green ones), adding in the mix, how Glaswegians, in general, have a morbid fear of washing with soap thus earning their collective nickname as ‘soap dodgers’ who, of course, live in Glasgow, otherwise known as ‘Soapdodge City’. Now, I’m quite familiar with some of the intense rivalry that can occur between British football teams, and in some instances, it can get quite ugly indeed, but what Keith described of the aftermath that can occur after an emotional match between the Celtics and the Rangers seems almost apocalyptic. Any unfortunate resident with a green car parked on the street after a horde of Rangers supporters drunkenly amble back home after an unsuccessful match with the Celtics is highly liable to be left with a green-coloured bit of scrap metal. And this, of course, may apply in reverse with those with blue coloured cars! So, I asked the question to my friend, what would happen if I stumbled into a typical Glasgow pub dressed half in Celtics green and half in Rangers blue. The answer was quick and to the point. A little man, probably dressed in green and white stripes as my friend resembled to as a ‘bumblebee on acid’ would instantly materialise next to me. He’d prod his finger at me and cry out, ‘Whit do you’re think yer doin, big man?’, and shortly thereafter, I’d be ripped to shreds by either Rangers or Celtics fans, or by both at the same time!

By the way, much to my amusement, somebody did just this back in 2019 as shown in the header image. Link to the article [here](#).

So, this is the issue. Being neutral isn't always an option. You *have* to take a side. 'Yer cannae just be split reet doon the middle!', my friend would exclaim. You've got to take a side. No one likes anyone taking the neutral position as one is considered a traitor on *both* sides. Sweden and Switzerland are countries not particularly loved politically by many for its unwillingness to take sides, except for those who live in them or for those who playing the clever accountant dodging the scythe of the taxman. Going back to sport in my city of Adelaide, those who go to the footy (Australian Rules football) to watch the Adelaide Crows play against Port Adelaide's Power (serious rivals to say the least), it's far more fun to take a side rather than be the neutral observer. I've been to a few footy matches in Adelaide and never experienced any malice like I had whilst going to some of Britain's football matches, but there most certainly is an air of competitive spirit on both sides of the arena. Having invited two sets of friends over for dinner, one of which are hardened Crows fans and the other being Power fans, a totally amicable discussion always ensues with lively harmless debate on which team is doing best or not. However, being a neutral observer makes one a little boring, kind of like Sweden or Switzerland. I'll be upfront and honest here. Regarding sport, I'm a bit like Sweden or Switzerland with a little Germany thrown in because I like to *vatch zee technical side of it, ja?*

I feel compelled to think this is often the way in politics as well; that being neutral puts you in the 'grey zone of indeterminacy', being incapable of taking a firm side, and thus making one unwelcome to take place in a political debate hosted by much of mainstream media; most of it being highly biased one way or another from neutrality. The 'Sweden and Switzerland' would inevitably come out and bore the sensationalised readers to a coma as they are expecting a little confirmation bias in their news stories. [The Economist](#) (in my opinion, an excellent publication and one I would consider subscribing to) is as neutral as it gets but it's not the sort of publication that most of 'Joe Public' are going to read, because it's just too damned boring.

The two largest political parties in each of the United States, Australia and the United Kingdom comprise of the Democrats and Republicans, Labour and Liberals and Labour and Conservatives respectively. It has not always been that way, but certainly, in my lifetime, this has been the case. Most anybody who asks me during voting season as to which of the two parties I voted for would be

sorely disappointed because I never divulge my answer, although those who know me well could *infer* as to who I might have voted for. It is, for some, a very private affair. What party or individual one may claim or stated to have voted for, could, in reality, be totally different.

I can reveal; however, that I consider myself ‘*red pill*’ rather than ‘*blue pill*’, preferring to question *why* something happens rather than just *accepting* it based on what others think. As for politics, I honestly do not know where I fit because I take the good things from that side, a few other good things from there, and perhaps, take a couple more good things from that obscure candidate who has as much chance of getting elected as I growing a full head of hair. Again, I take the boring ‘Sweden and Switzerland’ approach and, honestly, it’s like being a rubber fender being squashed between a boat and its berth. Many of my friends and family are bashing me on one side proclaiming Trump to be no better than a new Satan returning to destroy humanity whilst a relatively smaller gaggle of friends and colleagues will bash *anything* to do with socialism including the provision of free health care and a public road network paid by the taxpayer, initiatives which I, personally, admire. As for the other side, I admire the premise that the economy needs a bit of pizzazz to get going and that government’s reach into many other affairs are often best handled by the private sector. I also have a healthy respect for good traditional values, the preservation of ancient institutions and practices should they be of goodwill in nature, and the premise that change, purely for the sake of change rather than real progress, is unnecessary and wasteful. For example, the adoption of new words and phrases to replace those which now offend a small group of individuals is often an abhorrent practice in my book and carries all the traits of the wokeful, progressive left. Enough said, I think I’ve elaborated too much there!

A very small group in my circle think as I do, in which, politics and initiatives transcend what is black or white, or who is a Democrat or a Republican, or take part in the singling out of leaders and figureheads purely based on their behaviours. I’m far happier dwelling in the sphere of the so-called [*intellectual dark web*](#) listening in on scintillating discussions between intelligent people from any facet of opinion you can think across a wide variety of subjects. This is in stark contrast to the heavily polarised and carefully curated world of mainstream media. For example, in Australia, the opinion bias between, say, ABC News and Sky News is as wide as the cosmos. *Anything* Sky News reports on just *has* to be contradictory to what the story holds in ABC News and vice

versa. You can be guaranteed that if a report on ABC News breaks news that the proposal to build a new coal mine is going to cause irreparable damage to the immediate surroundings, Sky News will counter this stating that environmentalists opposed to the mine have no consideration to future employment in the area. It's so damned predictable and tedious to watch as none of them, most of the time, will venture anywhere near middle ground and offer an objective report but rather to rely on cherry-picking news items along with carefully selected edits of video footage to suit the viewer's mindset. I'm seriously proposing that all video interviews have a real clock in the background, perhaps sitting on a mantelpiece or a shelf, to indicate if any portions of the video have been redacted!

Going back to the question of who I'd vote for, it's likely that it will be for someone or a party *outside* of the main parties. This is not because I'm doing so out of spite for not choosing a side, one of which, is far more likely to win than one of the outsiders, but rather, because it is so often that those smaller parties tend to have manifestos more in tune to what I believe in. Strangely enough, I remember at the age of 10 whilst living in Colorado, that I said I would have voted if I could for the independent, [John Anderson](#), who was running against Reagan during 1980. Moreover, I even vaguely remember *why* as well!

Many political systems are based on two main parties with third and successive parties being way down the pecking order in terms of the number of votes received. The problem, of course, with voting for none of the two biggest parties is that one is challenging [Duverger's Law](#), which makes two-party systems far more viable in a plurality-rule election. The danger of doing this is that, instead of giving a vote to the smaller party, one is simply offering the vote to one of the two main parties one doesn't want in the first place. Most people's thought processes are what's the point of voting for someone who doesn't have a hope in hell of a chance of getting in and that the best thing to do is to vote for the 'less-bad' one of the two main parties to ensure the 'bad' one doesn't get in.

A similar thought process, but somewhat in reverse, happened not too long ago in Adelaide where the case of an unusually vocal domestic episode took place between two individuals in a house during the night. Tragically, it was found that a death had occurred which, apparently, could have been prevented if reported. After several interviews with the residents, it was found that most had heard the commotion, but none reacted because each one assumed that someone else would have reported it. In the case of politics, it is assumed that everyone

else will vote for the two biggest parties, so it's no point voting for any other because it would just be pointless.

Am I making sense?

Choosing an outlier with respect to voting often equates to being neutral and being a little bit like boring Sweden or Switzerland in the minds of many who proclaim that the vote won't do a damn thing at all. And it is that this very phenomenon strengthens the two primary parties and raises their vote counts heads and shoulders above any of the nearest outliers. Regardless of whether the party or individual most in tune to what I believe in belongs to one of the two main parties or an outlier is immaterial to me. I'm equally happy to be Sweden or Switzerland choosing an outlier or, instead, simply taking a main side choosing one of the two most popular choices depending on which best appeals to me in terms of manifesto and policies.

I still wouldn't chance my luck wearing half green and half blue into a pub in Glasgow, especially during the football!

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To quote the female bartender in the cowboy bar in one of my favourite movies, [*The Blues Brothers*](#), when she was asked by the Blues Brothers what kind of music they play here:

“Oh, we've got both kinds. Country *AND* Western!”