



The fields to the north of Launceston, Cornwall, from the air, photographed by Roy Curtis

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Morning News Country

Tory candidate says hunting not an issue at polls

Does the decision to drop the free vote on hunting from the Queen's speech mean it was a vote loser? Tory candidate **Tom Hunt** says no



The fox – did Tory promises to give MPs a vote on the way he can be hunted cost votes?

It is claimed that "senior Conservatives" are suggesting a key reason why the Conservative Party failed to secure a majority in the election on June 8 was the manifesto commitment for a free vote on the future of the Hunting Act.

Why would a pledge that was contained within the 2015 Party manifesto (a manifesto that led to us securing a majority) suddenly become a key factor in explaining why we failed to win a majority this time?

The commitment made this time round was actually less strong than the previous one. There is absolutely no logic to lazily lumping hunting together with the social care proposals and other campaign shortcomings as a key reason why the Party did not secure the result it wanted.

The debate about hunting can be

an emotional one, and it is clearly a key issue for an extremely vocal minority within the country. However, rather than being a key issue in the election campaign, the evidence suggests that it's of little, if any interest to the vast majority of the public.

On May 8 the Prime Minister stated that there should be a free vote on the future of fox hunting, and that she was personally in favour of loosening present restrictions on the practice. The following day the *Daily Mirror* ran with the headline, "Secret Tory plot to bring back fox hunting".

Surely, were the issue a significant factor in explaining last week's result, it would have led to immediate trouble in the polls? It didn't – and indeed on May 13 YouGov published a poll showing the Conservative lead at 18%.

More evidence has been published this week demonstrating the negligible impact that the hunting issue had on last week's results. ORB carried out research in the final week of the campaign (May 31-June 1), in which they asked a representative sample of the population what issues would influence their vote.

In total, 2,038 were interviewed and each one was asked to spontaneously raise three issues that would influence their vote. Only eight mentioned hunting (0.39%).

Of these eight people, seven said they were unlikely or would never vote Conservative. The pollsters then asked the same 2,038 people to compare the impact of hunting on their vote with other issues. Hunting ranked below wind farms, green belt development, mobile phone connectivity, animal welfare

and HS2 as issues that would influence their vote at the election. As someone who stood as a Conservative parliamentary candidate in an urban constituency at this election, I was surprised by claims suggesting that "Conservative candidates" were suggesting that hunting was a key issue.

I was very open regarding my pro-repeal position and my employment with the Countryside Alliance. I even enjoyed a positive swing towards me on a night when the national swing was towards the Labour Party. We should not allow animal rights extremists to portray the commitment to a free vote on the future of the Hunting Act as somehow being a cause of the Conservatives falling short.

A fuller version of this article appears on the Conservative Home website at sourcevalhome.com

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