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Analytical Article

UK 2024 Election Outcomes: What They Mean

The Labour Party achieved a sweeping victory in the 2024 UK general election, securing 412 out of 650 seats nationwide and ending 14 years of Conservative rule. Keir Starmer was sworn Prime Minister on Friday, July 5, drawing a close to an era dominated by five successive Conservative leaders. There is no doubt that the ruling system in Iran has proven its ability to overcome difficult challenges and has shown remarkable cohesion since Raisi's death,

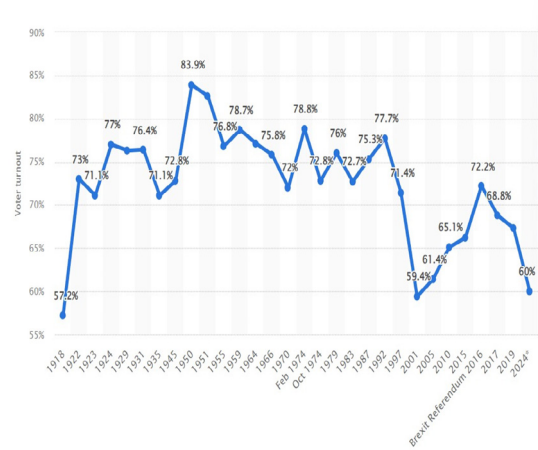
which could serve as a “rehearsal” for the more difficult test concerning the disappearance of Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei in the coming years or perhaps months.

This year’s elections follow the 2019 elections, where the Labour Party suffered its most significant defeat since 1983. The aftermath saw the removal of Jeremy Corbyn from leadership, with Keir Starmer stepping in as the new party leader in 2020. Thus, the outcomes of the 2024 elections sparked numerous questions about the election results, the factors behind Labour’s resurgence, and the influence of Keir Starmer, now both the party leader and British Prime Minister, as well as the key issues resonating with the British public and the party’s direction in light of these events.

Reading into the Electoral Scene

On July 4, 2024, British voters took to the polls, with around 46 million eligible to cast their votes. The voter turnout was about 60%, a significant drop of 13% compared to the 2019 elections.

Figure 1: Voter turnout in UK general elections, 1918–2024



Source: Statista

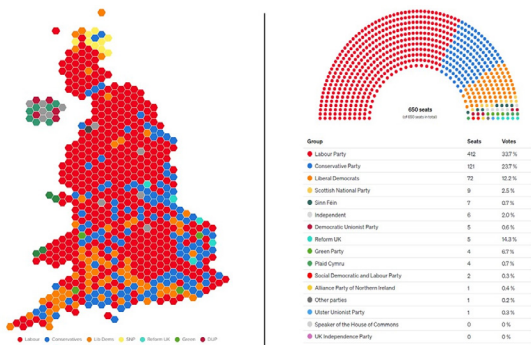
The Labour Party achieved a commanding majority in Parliament, significantly boosting their seat count from 203 in 2019 to an impressive 412 seats. However, the party’s overall share of the vote remained nearly unchanged, at 33.7% in the current elections compared to 32% in 2019. This seemingly paradoxical result highlights the quirks of the electoral system, where the candidate with the most votes in each district wins the seat, even if the margin is slim.

Conversely, the Conservative Party experienced a dramatic decline, losing 244 seats and securing only 121 seats this election cycle. Their share of parliamentary seats plummeted from over 56% in 2019 to about 19% this time. This significant drop also mirrored their reduced share of the

vote, falling from 43.6% in 2019 to 23.7% in the current elections.

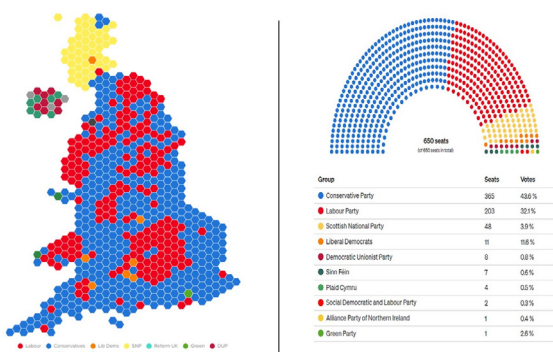
Figures 2 and 3 present the election outcomes by constituency and the number of seats each party secured in the 2024 and 2019 elections.

Figure 2: 2024 Election Outcomes



Source: POLITICO

Figure 3: 2019 Election Outcomes



Source: POLITICO

likely shape the political landscape in the coming period. These trends highlight a punitive vote against the Conservatives rather than an overwhelming endorsement of the Labour Party. The following are the most prominent outcomes of the elections:

- Nigel Farage, leader of Reform UK, managed to secure a seat in the current parliament, with his party winning a total of five seats. However, the more significant development is not merely their seat count but their share of the vote, which exceeded 14% of the total UK electorate. This underscores the presence of a far-right movement in the UK. However, its influence is not as pronounced as similar movements in Europe, likely due to the British public's more conservative approach to expressing views perceived as xenophobic.
- The Scottish National Party experienced a dramatic decline, dropping from 48 seats to just nine in the current election. This indicates a waning interest in the push for Scottish independence. Similarly, the Democratic Unionist Party in Northern Ireland saw a reduction from eight

The election results unveiled several noteworthy sub-trends that will

seats to five. Meanwhile, Sinn Féin party, which advocates for Northern Ireland's independence, maintained its seven seats. Ireland's remaining 6 seats were divided among smaller parties and independent candidates, indicating increased polarization and discontent with post-Brexit arrangements. This could lead to further polarization unless the Labour Party negotiates more favorable terms with the European Union for Northern Ireland.

- The Liberal Democrats made substantial gains, increasing their seat count from 11 in 2019 to 71 in the current elections, securing 12.2% of the vote, slightly less than Reform UK's share. Most of these seats were won in the southwestern regions, extending east into Oxfordshire—areas previously dominated by the Conservatives in 2005 and 2010 and areas with higher proportions of affluent voters from the 2016 Brexit referendum. Despite the Liberal Democrats' lower overall vote share, this success can be attributed to their centrist agenda, which resonates more closely with the center than Labour's left-leaning stance. The party also executed a highly focused

campaign, targeting constituencies where it had finished second to the Conservatives in 2019, leveraging the electoral system's mechanics.

- Independent candidates left a significant mark, securing 6 seats—an impressive increase from previous elections. At the same time, the Green Party gained ground, expanding their representation from one seat in 2019 to four seats in the current parliament.

Impact of the Labour Party's Victory on British Politics

To fully understand the implications of these outcomes, we will first review the current situation that has driven the Labour Party's success and will shape its future pledges and policies. Next, we will introduce the Labour Party leader, who will be responsible for implementing the party's promises to address these challenges. Finally, we will highlight the expected policies of the Labour Party in light of the current situation.

• The Current British Landscape

According to a Foreign Affairs report

on July 5, the British economic situation is dire, affecting most Britons negatively. Wage growth between 2010 and 2020 was the lowest in any peacetime decade since the Napoleonic Wars. Over the past 16 years, GDP per capita has grown by a mere 4.3%, compared to 46% in the preceding 16 years. The average annual real wage has plummeted by about \$14,000 from its pre-2008 financial crisis level. Since 2007, the country's annual productivity growth rate has been a meagre 0.4% per year, the lowest for a similar period since 1826.

This prolonged decline in growth has been mirrored in social welfare measures. The National Health Service (NHS), a longstanding source of British pride since its establishment in 1948, is currently facing an existential crisis. Last June, the non-partisan Institute for Government described hospital performance as “the worst in the history of the NHS.” Low growth and continued austerity measures by the Conservative Party have also led to a diminished quality of life for many of the poorest Britons. There are now 750,000 British children living in poverty, more than when the Conservatives came to power in 2010.

Worse, many local agencies have gone bankrupt, resulting in significant cuts to basic services such as waste collection, social care, and libraries. In 2022, the Commission on the UK's Future, an independent body chaired by former Labour Prime Minister Gordon Brown, found that, based on GDP per capita, half of the British population (more than 30 million people) live in areas no richer than the poorer parts of former East Germany and poorer than parts of Central and Eastern Europe and the US states of Mississippi and West Virginia.

Brexit has exacerbated this decline. Last March, the Office for Budget Responsibility (OBR) found that its forecast of a long-term productivity decline of 4% due to Brexit had come true. This has contributed to the country's worst decline in living standards since the 1950s. The OBR pointed out that if the UK had maintained its European market share before Brexit, its exports would have grown by \$64 billion instead of shrinking by \$4 billion between 2019 and 2022.

The situation extends beyond a general decline in social well-being. There has been a stark disparity in this decline between London and

the other regions of the United Kingdom. According to economist Philip McCann, the UK is likely the most unequal high-income country in the world, with these gaps widening in recent decades. In 2019, London's GDP per capita was \$73,000, almost 90% higher than in Scotland and eastern England, where it was just \$38,000. Brexit, which has reduced manufactured exports while allowing the service economy to continue thriving, has only widened these regional disparities. Within England, the wealth gap between the southeast and the struggling north is expected to reach \$290,000 per person by 2030. This growing inequality explains much of the rise in separatist movements in regions such as Scotland and Northern Ireland.

• **Who Is Keir Starmer?**

Keir Starmer has emerged as the central figure in the 2024 elections. Leading the Labour Party since April 2020, he took over from Jeremy Corbyn following the crushing defeat in the 2019 elections, where Corbyn's left-wing populist stance significantly affected the party.

Born in 1962 in London, Starmer comes from a working-class family. His father was a toolmaker, and his mother, Josephine, worked as a nurse

in the NHS while battling a chronic illness. This personal connection to the NHS is a recurring theme in Starmer's speeches, highlighting the importance of a healthcare system funded by taxpayers and accessible to all.

As the first in his family to attend university, Starmer studied law at the University of Leeds and then pursued postgraduate studies in law at the University of Oxford, focusing on human rights. His career has been marked by advocacy for unions, fighting against the death penalty, defending death row inmates in the Caribbean, challenging McDonald's on environmental grounds, and addressing human rights violations during the Northern Ireland conflict. In the early 2000s, he played a role in establishing a new peacekeeping police force.

Starmer's rise continued, and in 2008, he became the Director of Public Prosecutions, the top criminal prosecutor in England and Wales. In this role, he oversaw significant prosecutions, including those of MPs for embezzlement and journalists for phone tapping. His political journey began in 2015, when he was elected as the Member of Parliament for Holborn and Saint Pancras in north

London. In 2014, Queen Elizabeth II knighted him in recognition of his distinguished legal career.

Often described as a pragmatist, willing to do whatever it takes to win on the national stage, Starmer has worked to shift the Labour Party towards the center, distancing it from Corbyn's leftist leadership, despite having served as one of Corbyn's advisors. His reserved demeanor, shaped by his educational and professional background, combined with his relatively short political career, has led to perceptions of him as lacking charismatic leadership. This was reflected in a YouGov poll earlier this year, where he trailed behind Reform Party leader Nigel Farage in overall popularity, with a particularly sharp decline among younger voters.

In his election manifesto, Starmer laid out a series of policy pledges aimed at addressing the key concerns of British voters. According to a YouGov poll conducted on June 24, the most important issues for British voters were the economy (52%), health (50%), immigration and asylum (40%), and housing (24%).

Regarding health, Starmer pledged to reduce NHS waiting lists by offering

an additional 40,000 appointments each week, funded by tackling tax evasion and closing tax loopholes. On migration, he proposed launching a "Border Security Command" to combat human smuggling gangs arranging small boat crossings, while also cancelling the Rwanda scheme. For housing, he promised to build 1.5 million new homes by reforming planning laws and introducing a scheme to provide first-time buyers with a "first down payment" on new housing developments.

Starmer is unlikely to drastically alter the country's foreign and defence policies, except for efforts to mend ties and boost economic relations with the European Union. The pressing internal challenges and the deeply entrenched British foreign policy traditions, developed over decades, make significant shifts improbable. Starmer has committed to increasing defense spending to 2.5% of GDP when resources allow and maintaining the UK's nuclear deterrent, Trident, a submarine-based missile system. Although he supported the Remain campaign in the UK's 2016 Brexit referendum, he has pledged to improve the "failed," to use Starmer's words, deal between the UK and the EU in areas such as trade, research, and security, while

firmly stating that there is no reason for Britain to rejoin the EU.

- **Labour's Policy Agenda and Projected Challenges**

One pivotal factor behind the Conservative Party's significant defeat in 1997, paving the way for former Labour Prime Minister Tony Blair's sweeping victory, was the economic turmoil that erupted in September 1992. This crisis, marked by a collapse in the pound sterling, forced Britain to withdraw from the European Exchange Rate Mechanism, which then cast a long shadow of doubt over the government's ability to manage the economy. The same economic woes that dethroned the Conservatives after 14 years in power now echo through the corridors of power, albeit with Labour's return this time being less resounding than during Blair's era. This places the party and government in a precarious position amidst more intricate economic challenges.

Labour's manifesto lays out a range of policies aimed at addressing these crises, yet their approach leans more towards caution and procedure than bold, visionary solutions that match the depth of Britain's current predicament. Among the most notable pledges are:

Regarding education, the party announced plans to impose a 20% value-added tax on private school fees to fund the hiring of 6,500 additional teachers in public schools across England. Since only about 7% of UK children attend fee-paying private schools, the Institute for Fiscal Studies estimates that this tax would generate up to £1.6 billion annually. However, this revenue falls short of covering the full costs of recruiting, retaining, training, and compensating such a large number of teachers. Despite a 6.5% pay raise for experienced teachers in 2023–2024, their salaries remain 12% lower in real terms than since 2010.

On the housing front, Labour has pledged to build 1.5 million new homes in England over the next five years, a construction rate not seen since the 1960s. This ambitious promise comes against a backdrop of declining commitment to construction targets, with an average of only 152,000 homes completed annually over the past decade—nearly half of Labour's goal.

Concerning immigration and asylum, Labour has vowed to immediately scrap the controversial Rwanda scheme, aimed at deterring the English Channel crossings by

small boats. The Prime Minister took swift action to end this policy upon assuming office. Additionally, Keir Starmer pledged to allocate around £75 million annually to a new Border Security Command, a feasible move considering the existing funds earmarked for Rwanda (at least £541 million over five years). However, the challenge will lie in coordinating with Brussels and Paris to secure effective border control cooperation.

On climate change and environmental issues, Labour's most costly commitments come into play. Beyond existing climate change budgets, the party has pledged to invest £23.7 billion in green initiatives during the next Parliament—exceeding additional spending on health or education. This focus underscores the centrality of green policies in Labour's vision for growth and prosperity. Yet, implementation will be challenging. Governments have historically struggled to persuade homeowners to make environmentally friendly upgrades, even with substantial financial incentives. Furthermore, local opposition is likely to arise against new onshore solar farms and wind turbines, both crucial elements of the green energy strategy.

In line with their ambitious environmental goals, the Labour Party announced plans to reinstate the ban on new gasoline and diesel car sales starting in 2030, aiming to provide certainty for manufacturers. This decision reverses the government's move last September to push the deadline to 2035. The key challenge will be convincing enough drivers to switch to electric vehicles. Although more electric car models are entering the market, demand has remained stagnant over the past year.

In terms of healthcare, Labour has promised to add an extra 40,000 appointments each week in England—totaling two million annually—by expanding weekend services. Though this plan represents less than a 2% increase, experts believe it could be sufficient to reduce waiting times. Labour also proposed boosting private budget funding for health services, potentially increasing pressure on the government budget.

These and many other pledges require substantial government spending amid an environment of sluggish economic growth. Labour's strategy to fund these initiatives relies on generating £8 billion through revenue-raising measures. These include significantly altering

the non-dom tax status, cracking down on tax evasion, applying a value-added tax to private schools, and imposing a windfall tax on large energy companies. However, there remains uncertainty about how parents and energy companies will respond to these proposed taxes. Given Labour's commitment not to raise major taxes such as income tax, national insurance, VAT, and corporate tax (which collectively account for three-quarters of total tax revenue), meeting their revenue targets precisely will be challenging.

Conclusion

The voting percentages secured by the Labour Party, though sufficient to win the majority of seats, put it at a disadvantage in terms of the popular vote, making it subject to closer public scrutiny. This heightened scrutiny is understandable, as much of Labour's support came from voters dissatisfied with Conservative policies rather than those fully endorsing Labour's platform. Starmer's reserved demeanor only intensifies this trend.

Regarding the Labour party's commitment to its political promises, there is skepticism about whether these pledges will be realized, given

the proposed methods for raising revenues. This skepticism suggests that the party may either increase taxes or fail to fully honor its commitments, most of which are not particularly ambitious considering the country's economic downturn, except for their green initiatives. This focus might push the party to prioritize these environmental policies or risk an unfavorable position in the next elections.

On the foreign policy front, significant increases in defense spending are unlikely. Transatlantic relations are expected to improve under a Democratic US administration compared to a Republican one, though the fundamental depth of UK-US relations will remain unchanged. In terms of the Middle East, there's an expectation of heightened UK engagement in the region, leveraging its relationships with the United States and the European Union. UK policies are anticipated to adopt a less confrontational approach. However, this doesn't signify a complete shift in current policies, particularly regarding the Palestinian issue. This dynamic is likely to stir internal party tensions for Starmer, leading to a more moderated stance compared to that of the Conservative Party.