

Document 1 – ‘Times change, principles don’t’: Britons share what will decide their vote this election

***The Guardian*, by Jedidajah Otte, June 18, 2024**

[...] “Keir Starmer may not be the most electrifying politician, but he is what we need right now. A safe, competent pair of hands who can bring some stability. And I’d absolutely trust Labour more with the NHS than the Tories. Labour will probably be more willing to invest in it.”

Sean is one of many hundreds of people from all parts of the UK who told the Guardian they would switch to a different party this UK general election, in response to an online callout asking Britons about the issues that will decide their vote, and their voting intentions.

While about a third of respondents said they had resolved to vote for Labour, again, with varying levels of enthusiasm, about another third were voters from across the political spectrum who said that they would back a different party than they had at the previous election.

The remainder said they were undecided, among them many previous Labour voters, and especially women.

Some people said they were not planning to vote this year out of frustration with manifestos they felt had little hope of achieving meaningful change. [...]

A key theme was that voters felt neither Labour nor the Conservatives had presented a fully credible vision for turning the country’s fortunes around, with many saying they were therefore turning to smaller parties with a focus on a string of often local and divisive issues that the two main parties have failed to centre in their campaigns. A lack of trust in politicians in Westminster who had, respondents said, broken pledges, misled or even lied to the electorate, for instance about Brexit, was cited by a large number of people.

A second major theme was that hundreds of people with a diverse voting history were planning to vote tactically to topple Rishi Sunak’s government, rather than out of appetite for his challengers’ offerings. [...]

Dozens of respondents said they were switching back to Labour after having voted for other parties in 2019, saying Starmer’s leadership had sufficiently reassured them that the party was fit for government now. [...]

Constituencies with relatively higher numbers of over-50s, homeowners and people of white ethnicity are key to Labour’s hopes of winning a majority at the election, Guardian analysis suggests. [...]

A perceived widespread lack of enthusiasm for the two mainstream parties appeared to have motivated hundreds of respondents to vote tactically for smaller parties or independent candidates, with some seeming genuinely hopeful that even substantial majorities in their seats could be overturned, while others were concerned that divisive local issues could splinter the opposition vote. [...]

Scores of people, many of them from less advantaged households, struggling financially, or with disabilities, were feeling taken for granted by Labour and the Conservatives. [...]

Hundreds of people, of all political leanings and from across the nation, said they were switching parties over a small number of particular and very diverse issues, such as sewage in rivers, Palestine, private school fees and Ulez schemes. [...]

Many dozens of voters [also] cited dishonesty and a lack of morality among politicians as a major factor shaping their vote, particularly those from the north of England, many of them in red wall seats.

Labour and the Conservatives were both lambasted by voters for having betrayed their trust.

Document 2 - Why a disillusioned, angry Britain voted for change

***Politico*, July 5, 2024, by Dan Bloom**

Britain's Labour party swept to a stunning victory Friday [but] this is not a story of Britain lurching to the left. This is a story about something deeper — about broken promises and broken trust; about failing public services and household bills you can't pay; a collective lust for change. It's about a deep disillusionment with politics. [...]

Britain is not in a good way. Living costs have spiraled over recent years, yet the tax take is the highest it's been since 1950. The average home costs £281,000, up nearly £100,000 in a decade. Food bank use has almost doubled in five years.

The (still-beloved) National Health Service has 7.6 million cases waiting for treatment in England alone, almost triple what it was a decade ago. [...] Long-term sickness is up by a third since Covid-19. [...]

Potholes pit the roads. Prisons are full. Petty crimes take six months to go through court. Social care reform is long promised, but never delivered. Two-fifths of universities are headed into deficit. Multiple local councils have issued bankruptcy notices. Sewage overflows into rivers during heavy rain.

Yet none of this deterred the record 1.2 million people who migrated to the U.K. in 2023 [...]. Concern about legal and illegal migration is predictably high.

Such are the factors fueling the profound sense of state failure which swept the governing Conservatives from power on July 4. This was not about left or right. Labour's election slogan was just one word — "change." The right-wing Reform UK touched on a similar theme — "Britain is broken." [...]

Starmer, and indeed Sunak, diagnosed many of these problems with clarity during the campaign — in truth, they could hardly have missed them. But proffered solutions have been vague at best. Experts warn Labour's limited pledges on tax and spend will not come close to matching the scale of the crisis. And voters know it.

Despite Starmer's landslide, Labour's overall vote share was far lower than in 1997 or 2001. Actual voter turnout was the second-lowest in a century. There is no nationwide wave of joy at this result. [...]

"Party de-alignment has been happening at pace," said Katwala. Faith, ethnic background and the places where people live are all less likely to determine the way people vote than they were a generation ago. [...] For Starmer, as a centrist, this suits him, because he's not a natural politician of dividing lines."

The seeds of voter disillusionment in the U.K. have been sown over decades, and are well-rehearsed. The despair over Britain's involvement in the Iraq War in 2003; the shock of the 2008 economic crisis; the polarization of the 2016 vote to leave the EU, the political chaos that followed, and Brexit's failure — thus far — to deliver. The £400 billion Britain borrowed for Covid-related spending, and the impact of Russia's war in Ukraine, pushed U.K. inflation to a 40-year high in 2022. [...]

"The major challenge is absolute disillusionment — not just with politics, but with the ability of government to deliver," Blair's former Home Secretary David Blunkett, now a member of the House of Lords, told POLITICO. [...]

Document 3 - This election has upended British politics. A strange new landscape is revealed

***The Guardian*, by Rafael Behr, July 5, 2024**

Elections do not change countries overnight. They reveal changes that were hidden – or visible but neglected – beneath layers of political complacency and cultural habit. [...]

Although opinion polls made a Conservative defeat look inevitable, there is a difference between forecasting regime change and waking up in a Britain that has dispatched scores of Tory MPs to political oblivion and chosen Keir Starmer to be prime minister with a commanding majority.

To what extent the results express a positive endorsement of Labour and its leader is hard to measure. The imperative to punish the Tories for years of political malpractice was palpable on the campaign trail in a way that exultant Starmer fandom was not. But contempt for an incumbent government and enthusiasm for the only available replacement are never exactly matched. [...]

The de facto tactical voting alliance that has crushed the Conservatives to what could be their lowest level of parliamentary representation reveals a force of broadly liberal, centre-ground moderation that has been latent in British politics, but demoralised and divided.

Starmer may not have wanted to talk about Brexit during the campaign (except in defensive assertion that he will never reverse it), but the spirit of fury that has ravaged the Tories in some of their heartlands contains a strain of remainer vengeance.

The same cultural faultline shows up in the handful of seats that Reform has won and many more where Nigel Farage's party has pushed the Tories into third place. On terrain prepared by the 2016 leave vote, Reform has embedded itself as the natural repository for dissatisfaction with the status quo. Farage himself, finally achieving penetration of the Commons after seven failed attempts, will act as a beacon of anti-Westminster, anti-immigration, nationalist reaction. [...]

Sunak's failure to grasp that he could not compete with Faragist posturing while also trying to run a serious, credible government was the defining strategic error of his time in Downing Street.

The outgoing prime minister had the opportunity to present himself as an antidote to the reckless and cavalier style of government embodied by Boris Johnson. Rehabilitation of Conservative economic credibility might not have been feasible after Liz Truss's calamitous short reign, but some restoration of the "integrity, professionalism and accountability" that Sunak pledged on entering No 10 should not have been beyond reach.

But it couldn't be done with a policy agenda moulded to the whims of a hard-right Tory faction. Sunak has learned the hard way that if you offer voters a populist tribute act, they might just vote for the real thing. [...]

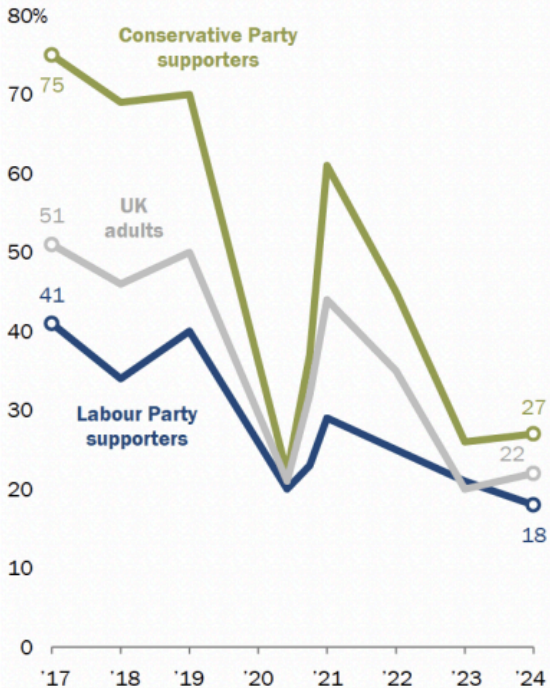
To an extent, Sunak's failure was seeded in the unstable electoral coalition that Johnson assembled in 2019 with the promise to "get Brexit done". [...] An equivalent challenge now falls to Starmer. The size of the Labour majority affords vast legislative power, but the sea of red on the map covers a complex disparity of interests and competing demands that the new government will struggle to satisfy. Seats that have been recaptured in what used to be called the "red wall" will not settle back into the old tribal allegiance.

The era of automatic party affiliation, handed down across generations and worn as a badge of unshakable cultural identity, is over. [...]

Document 4

Few Britons think their country's economy is in good shape

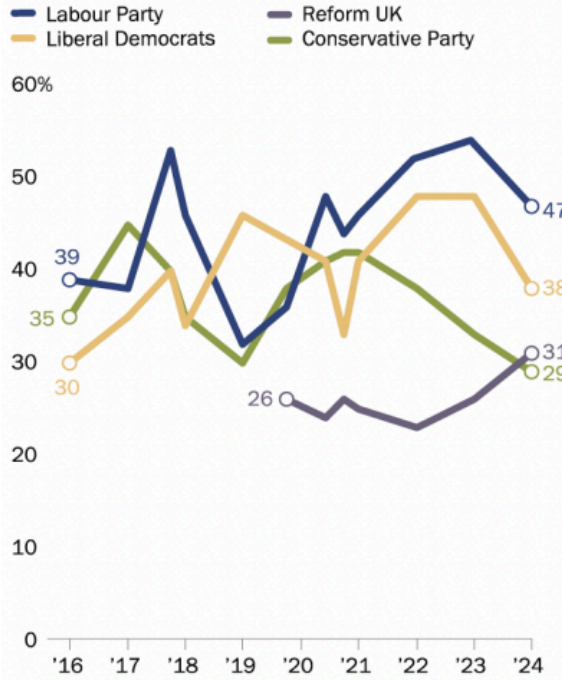
% of British adults who say the current economic situation in the UK is *good*



Source: Spring 2024 Global Attitudes Survey.
PEW RESEARCH CENTER

Views of major UK political parties have become more negative in recent years

% of British adults who have a *favorable* view of ...



Source: Spring 2024 Global Attitudes Survey.
PEW RESEARCH CENTER

Document 5



What did the 2024 UK General Elections reveal about the State of UK politics?

- 1) The elections exposed a fragmented political landscape where traditional party affiliations no longer define voters' choices, leading to a significant regional realignment, as traditional party strongholds were upended.
- 2) The election underscored the erosion of trust in government institutions and politicians and a disavow of government's failures to address pressing national issues.
- 3) The elections have shown how the socio-economic concerns have now come to the front of many voters' decisions.