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Britain

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As Britain grapples with the aftermath of its recent general election, the political landscape is shifting dramatically. With the Labour left marginalised and the far-right Reform UK surging, the implications for Britain's future and the international scene are profound.

In an article published [here](#) five weeks before the UK general election, we argued that two key takeaways from the election would be the marginalisation of the Labour left and a big surge for Reform UK – and that this would reflect an international push for power from the hard right. This is exactly what is underway. Below we review what this means internationally, but first, it is necessary to look at the outcome in Britain.

Labour's Fragile Victory

Labour's huge 410 seats were won with just 35% of the vote on a 60% turnout – in other words by 21% of the electorate. Doubtless, some abstainers didn't bring any photo ID with them or were worried about their immigration status. But there was an 'active' abstention by 35% of the electorate. This low score of votes for Labour underlines the fragility of their vote.

The voters took to the polls with the same attitude towards the Tories as those villagers who attack the hillside castle in Dracula movies – determined to drive a stake through the heart of the vampire. To do this, voters in many cases voted for parties that were not their first choice, especially cross-overs between the Liberal Democrats and Labour. But darker things were afoot.

In the 98 seats where Reform UK came second, 89 of them were in seats won by Labour, leading to Nigel Farage's boast that in the next election Reform "is coming for Labour". The total votes were nine million for Labour, seven million for the Conservatives and four million for Reform UK. And around two million for the Greens.

What's going to happen in the Conservative Party? The four leading candidates for the leadership are all from the hard right – Suella Braverman, Kemi Badenoch, Priti Patel and Robert Jenrick. The predominant discourse in the 'Conservative family', which includes newspapers, magazines and broadcast pundits, is that the Tories lost because they were "not conservative enough." But this cannot be substantiated by the facts. In every poll, voters cared more about the cost of living, social care and the NHS, way above taxation and immigration. Voters expressed scepticism about Labour's plans to fix these things, and probably many voting Labour did so more in hope than expectation.

Labour has no real plan to fix anything from social care to sewage-strewn rivers because they have no real plan to raise the money needed to do that. Instead, they propose the "magical realism" of growing the economy and public sector reform. Within two years or so Labour will be mired in conflict with the unions, increasingly unpopular because of the failure to fix anything substantial and embattled with progressive voters over the Middle East.

Five independent candidates were elected whose platform was mainly about Gaza or who featured it prominently (including Jeremy Corbyn in Islington North). Other independent candidates like Andrew Feinstein in Holborn and St Pancras got high votes while the Greens won almost two million votes.

Votes for independents suffered from there being no viable national structure or party framework behind them. In

other words, whereas Reform had a clear national profile and platform to the right of the main parties, other independent candidates had no such platform or programme to the left, and the Greens have not always been left-wing in this country.

The Direction of the Tories

In a recent poll, 50% of Conservative members said they would like the party to merge with Reform UK. There's no doubt Nigel Farage would emerge as party leader from any such deal. But this poll tells us everything we need to know about the politics of Tory members. This now includes more than 200 ex-MPs, unleashed from the Tory whip. But you cannot put a cigarette paper between Reform UK and ex-Tory MPs like the belligerent Jonathan Gullis, formerly representing Stoke-on-Trent North, and the more refined Jacob Rees-Mogg whose sister Annunziata is a leading member of Reform. Another in the category of ex-MPs is Steve Baker, a parliamentary right-wing fixer until he was made a junior government minister in 2022. Also on the ex-MPs list is Michael Gove, still popular among Tory members.

The developments on the British right cannot be analysed outside of the politics of the European right as a whole. On numerous fronts, the traditional 'centre-right' are being crowded out by parties that are on the 'creeping fascism' spectrum. They make up the biggest bloc in the new European parliament. The participants in recent European hard-right conferences in Brussels in 2023 and Madrid this year were Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban, Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni, Marine Le Pen from the French National Rally and Spanish Vox leader Santiago Abascal. Both conferences were held under the banner of National Conservatism and included right-wing theorist Frank Furedi, Professor Emeritus at Kent University.

National Conservatism: The New Right-Wing Vanguard

The National Conservatism conferences targeted allegedly 'woke' ideology, especially left and liberal concerns for racial and gender equality. Giorgia Meloni, leader of the Brothers of Italy, and Santiago Abascal of Vox are vocal in their denunciation of "gay agendas"; that "undermine the traditional family and the traditional role of women as mothers and homemakers".

But what is National Conservatism, and what is Illiberal Democracy? National Conservatism is the idea that we are now (or should be) in a post-neoliberal globalisation phase. According to author and academic Angelos Chrysogelos, National Conservatism is increasingly the ideology of the new mainstream parties that have displaced more 'moderate' right-wing parties in Hungary, Poland and Italy, and threaten to do the same in France, Germany and – via Reform UK – in Britain.

National Conservatism cannot roll back the juggernaut of economic globalisation, but it can limit it. A recent example is the American decision to impose huge tariffs on Chinese-made electric vehicles to defend American producers. But this is a double-edged sword. One of the biggest manufacturers in China is Elon Musk's Tesla, a truly globalised company

National Conservatism promotes, in theory at least, the role of the national state as opposed to international bodies like the IMF, the World Trade Organisation and, especially, the UN and world and European courts.

But most importantly, National Conservatism advocates state intervention to promote traditional values and defeat the 'woke' agenda. This could involve anything from banning school books that explain Britain's role in the slave trade to banning the teaching of alternative sexualities and genders. This is the 'anti-woke' agenda now on full display in the US Supreme Court, which has effectively banned reproductive rights in many US states.

National Conservatism goes hand-in-hand with Viktor Orbán's 'illiberal democracy'. This means using the state to manage democratic rights, like the right to demonstrate on issues like Gaza, hold pride marches, and organise political rallies. It also means purging the local and national state apparatuses and doing the same in university and high school teaching.

And of course, National Conservatism means political mobilisation on the basis of anti-immigrant racism and nationalism.

A lot of these things are already happening in Britain but they are imposed in an uneven way, according to national circumstances. In Poland, National Conservatism in power wrapped itself in reactionary Catholicism, which is not the case elsewhere.

Suella Braverman has been an important attendee at National Conservative conferences and she is highly likely to be one of the two candidates referred to the membership in the upcoming Conservative leadership election. If they vote for her, there is sure to be a united front with Farage on many questions.

According to Tim Bale, four leading candidates for the Tory leadership – Kemi Badenoch, Robert Jenrick, Priti Patel and Suella Braverman – all seem to adhere to the right-wing mantra that the Conservatives lost the election because they were "not conservative enough".

In the general election, the anti-woke agenda was downplayed. But after the Tory leadership is decided in favour of Braverman or front-runner Kemi Badenoch, a full-on anti-woke agenda can be expected, focusing on anti-trans ideology and targeting Gaza demonstrations as racist "hate marches" and left-wing/Gaza demonstrators as "violent" towards MPs and "out of step with 'British values'". A key target for the anti-woke theorists is teaching, and in particular left-wing or liberal university teachers. These things are out there in the Tory and right-of-Tory ecosystems, but with an effective Conservative-Reform united front in parliament, they could become the focus of a massive ideological offensive.

The Extreme Right's International Influence

The fate of the extreme right in Britain is linked to that of the extreme right internationally. Political leaders on the creeping fascism spectrum are already in government in Italy, Hungary, Turkey, Argentina and the Netherlands. The danger of Donald Trump coming to power again in the United States looks even more likely after the attempted assassination and the refusal of an obviously struggling Biden to step down as the Democratic candidate.

Farage talks of Reform targeting the 2029 election to become the biggest party in parliament. But the extreme right is not the only show in town.

People Power

The Green Party won four seats and came second to Labour in dozens of others. Campaigners for Gaza or a more extensive left-of-Labour programme won five MPs and organised hundreds of activists. In a post-election opinion piece, Jeremy Corbyn outlines how he and local community activists intend to maintain strong roots in the constituency by campaigning and helping local people with their problems. Of those who mobilised around his campaign, he says:

‘...energy needs somewhere to go. It needs to be channelled. It needs to be mobilised. That’s why our campaign will organise with those who have been inspired by our victory to build community power in every corner of the country. Once our grassroots model has been replicated elsewhere, this can be the genesis of a new movement capable of challenging the state two-party system. A movement that offers a real alternative to child poverty, inequality and endless war. A movement that provides a real opposition to the far right – one that doesn’t concede ground to divisive rhetoric, but stands by its principles of anti-racism, equality and inclusion.

‘I have no doubt that this movement will eventually run in elections. However, to create a new, centralised party, based around the personality of one person, is to put the cart before the horse. Remember that only once strength is built from below can we challenge those at the top.’

But this counterposition of building locally from the bottom upwards, against organising nationally, in trade unions, in national campaigns, and inside student struggles is terribly one-sided and avoids the crucial role of socialist organisation.

It would be brilliant if the Islington North model could be repeated in every corner of the country, but it cannot. Islington North campaigners have got to where they are because their candidate is the former leader of the Labour Party, and on the basis of thirty years or more local work, has talked to every local campaign and thousands of local constituents.

Local community and campaigning structures will inevitably face national and international questions. Waiting until Islington-type community power before standing candidates is a very long-term perspective that takes place in the context of an extreme right that will also fight for community allegiance. That is unthinkable in Islington North but a real proposition in northern and midlands ‘red wall’ towns. Reform UK will also advocate a programme that demagogically appears to defend the NHS and working-class living standards by, for example, opposing the two-child benefit cap.

All the evidence from across Europe and Latin America shows that local support has been built from national electoral alliances of parties, not just from ‘the bottom up’. The bold experiment with community power organised 20 years ago in the southern Brazilian city of Porto Alegre was based on the national and local power of the Workers Party (PT).

But this is not a one-way street. The PT emerged by fusing together diverse political trends, and especially radicalised Christians and the militant trade unionists from the ‘ABC’ industrial zone in Sao Paulo. This involved local and national political organisation, including revolutionary political trends. Broad left parties in Spain and Greece emerged from mass struggles in the post-2008 austerity period, but they did not do that by simply linking up local struggles.

To argue in the British context that doubtless candidates will stand once the Islington model of local empowerment has been realised, is to put it off to the indefinite future.

In France in the recent elections, the offensive of the far-right Rassemblement Nationale was repelled in large part by the electoral alliance of the New Popular Front, involving the Communist Party, the Greens, the Socialist Party and crucially France Insoumise (Insurgent France). France Insoumise has not been built by ignoring elections or refusing to build a national political organisation.

Jeremy Corbyn is right to imply that a new left party cannot be built instantly by declaring a new party around one individual. But without some sort of national coordination, a new national party will never be built.

Further Reading

[Global elections, hard right reaches for power](#)

[Creeping fascism, Neil Faulkner et al](#)

[National conservatism](#)

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