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Britain

# A Labour landslide?

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### **There is a new government at Westminster. Rishi Sunak's gamble of calling a snap election did not pay off.**

But while Labour's Sir Keir Starmer claims a landslide the reality is different if you look at votes cast. His left-wing predecessor Jeremy Corbyn, whom Starmer detests, motivated more people to vote Labour than he did. Turn out at this election was low. This was an election the Tories lost rather than one Starmer won.

#### **Total Labour votes in last three General Elections**

2017 (Corbyn)	12 877 918
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2029 (Corbyn)	10 269 051
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2024 (Starmer)	9 634 399
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And that matters because there will be challenges to the new Prime Minister, even electorally. Not only was Corbyn, banned by Starmer from standing as a Labour candidate, re-elected as an independent but four other independents standing on a pro-Palestinian platform also defeated their Labour opponents. It will particularly rankle that one of the scalps that was taken here was that of arch-Starmerite and shadow cabinet member Jonathan Ashworth, deeply implicated in the witch-hunt against the left. And the fact that the even more dangerously neoliberal MP Wes Streeting, predictably appointed as Health Secretary, came within 500 votes of losing his seat to Leanne Mohamed, a British Palestinian woman, leaves no room for complacency. We should also note that the Green Party – which while it has weaknesses is definitely well to the left of Labour under Starmer, went from a single MP to four. Then there are a small number of reliable left MPs who did manage to stand for Labour, not by any means least Diane Abbott, the first Black woman to be elected to Westminster. Starmer attempted to block her from standing but was forced to back down by a huge campaign in her support.

And it is not only from the left that there will be tests for the new Prime Minister. Nigel Farage, the leader of the far right party Reform finally won a seat in parliament at his eighth attempt – and is joined by four other MPs. And what is as much of a concern to anyone worried about the shift to the right in the centre of British politics, they came second in many other places. As good news from France about the electoral defeat of the National Rally (Rassemblement National) percolates across the airwaves, the fear is that it is not only the Tories who are responding to their growth by accommodating to their ideas, but the new government itself.

It is true that Starmer has said that the deeply reactionary scheme to deport asylum seekers to Rwanda is dead – but only because he argues it would not be effective. Labour's rhetoric on migration is within the same ideological framework as Reform, the Tories and indeed the French NR – that migrants are a 'problem' that need to be managed, rather than human beings fleeing war, poverty and climate chaos that are created by the driving search for profit and for power regardless of the cost to others.

And migration is not the only policy on which the new government needs to be challenged. Public services are in crisis after a decade and more of austerity and living standards have fallen disastrously both for those in and out of employment. But Labour's insistence to religiously stick to spending limits will do nothing to change any of this

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meaning that it is unlikely there will be much of a honeymoon period before unions and campaigners begin to organise systematically to demand change.

A similar pattern may well be repeated on other key questions from climate – where Labour has significantly diluted earlier promises, to the National Health Service where they want to deepen private sector involvement and many more areas than there is scope to explore In this article. Meanwhile the genocide in Gaza continues and the Palestine solidarity movement, despite both post-election exhaustion and appalling weather, has made it clear it intends to keep the pressure up on this government as much as on the last.

*7 July 2024*

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