

2024 GE: Voting behaviour and the media

Q) What shaped voting behaviour the most in 2024?

Edexcel: 4.1 Case studies of three key general elections

AQA: 3.1.2.2 Elections and referendums

What are the main theories of voting behaviour?

Sociological Model (Columbia School)	This model, developed at Columbia University and detailed in <i>The People’s Choice</i> (1944), argues that voters’ choices are closely linked to their social groups (e.g. social class, gender, ethnicity). It suggests that social groups typically support parties that reflect their collective interests and values. Voting behaviour is heavily influenced by socialisation - the process through which individuals learn and internalise the values, beliefs, and norms of their social groups through interactions with family, friends, and their wider community.
Psychological Model (Michigan School)	This model, developed by academics at the University of Michigan and detailed in <i>The American Voter</i> (1960), argues that voters develop strong psychological attachments to political parties through socialisation and personal experiences. According to this model, voters often identify with a party as an extension of their own identity (e.g., “I am a Conservative”). Once this partisan identification is established, it influences how voters perceive and evaluate political issues and candidates, shaping their political judgments and choices.
Rational Choice Theory (Downsian Model)	This model was developed by economist Anthony Downs in <i>An Economic Theory of Democracy</i> (1957). Downs argued that voters act as rational individuals who evaluate the costs and benefits of voting for different parties or candidates. They choose the option that best aligns with their preferences and offers the greatest personal advantage. Just as consumers make purchasing decisions based on the expected benefits and costs of different products, voters select parties based on a rational assessment of their relative benefits.
Spatial Model & Valence Theory	Finally, there are two distinct theories on how voters might make their rational choice. The <b>spatial model</b> argues that voters select candidates or parties whose positions on key policy issues align most closely with their own preferences—for example, whether to increase or cut public spending. In contrast, the <b>valence model</b> suggests that voters often do not take strong policy positions but instead choose the party or leader they perceive as most competent and capable of delivering positive improvements - e.g. lower unemployment.

# Is there a way to tie these theories together?

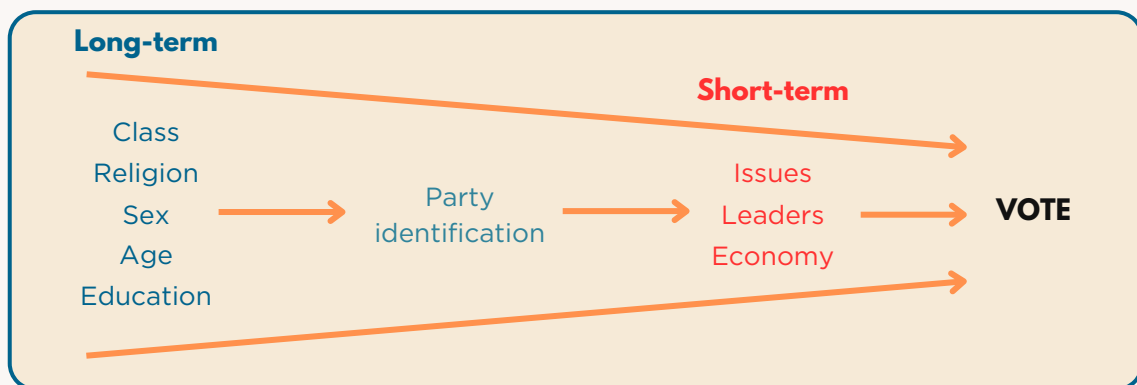
The models of voting behaviour most favoured by **psephologists** (academics that study elections and voting behaviour) have tended to change over time.

Sociological and psychological models were predominant in the 1950s and 60s because this was a period of strong **class-alignment** - voting appeared to be strongly tied to social class. A majority of working class voters identified with and voted for the Labour Party, while most middle class voters identified with the Conservative Party.

However, with the onset of **class-dealignment** in the 1970s and 80s, and the erosion of the link between social class and voting, attention shifted to rational choice theory. As elections became more volatile, the focus moved from long-term partisan attachments formed through socialisation to the idea that an increasingly educated electorate was making a rational choice, based on their individual policy preferences, at each election.

By the 1990s and 2000s, academics were increasingly questioning the extent of voters' policy knowledge, and their ability to evaluate the costs and benefits of party manifestos. As a result, the focus shifted to valence theory, which posits that voters prioritise party or leader competency to deliver on 'valence issues', such as reducing unemployment, based on an assessment of their past track record and reputation.

However, in recent years, as education has emerged as an increasingly strong indicator of party choice, there has been a renewed emphasis on sociological factors. Research shows that education influences voters' values and preferences, which in turn affects their voting choices. This interaction between long-term sociological factors and short-term issue factors is often illustrated through the '**funnel of causation**' model (below):



The funnel of causation model explains how various factors might cumulatively and interactively influence voting behaviour. It posits that long-term influences, like social class and education, shape voters' core values and partisan identification, creating a lens through which short-term influences, such as election campaigns or the perceived competency of party leaders, are interpreted. For instance, a voter aligned with a particular party may view that party's leader or the economy more favourably when they're in power. However, sufficiently significant short-term factors, such as a major economic crisis or a transformative event like the 2016 EU referendum, can disrupt this alignment and prompt a *realignment*—a shift in which voters reassess their core values and partisan loyalties, and begin to identify with a different party.

# How did long-term factors shape the 2024 vote?

## 1) Education

	Lab	Con	Lib Dem	Reform	Green	SNP/PC	Other
Qualifications							
No qualifications	28%	39%	4%	18%	3%	6%	2%
Other quals	30%	32%	13%	13%	4%	3%	5%
Degree or higher	43%	19%	16%	7%	9%	3%	3%
Source: Ipsos MORI							

Just as in the 2016 EU referendum, and the 2017 and 2019 General Elections, education had one of the strongest links to voting behaviour in 2024. While Labour, Lib Dem and Green candidates received their strongest support from university graduates, the Conservatives and Reform UK received more votes from people without qualifications. Other socio-demographic characteristics that proved to be solid indicators of voting behaviour, such as age and geographic region, can also be linked to this education gap - younger voters are more likely to have gone to university than older generations, and are more likely to live alongside other graduates in cities and university towns.

Surveys have found that younger generations, particularly university graduates, are more likely to emphasise ‘**post-materialist**’ values, including individual self-expression, and social justice, while non-graduates are more likely to emphasise the ‘**materialist**’ values of economic and physical security, and conformity to traditional moral beliefs.

Post-materialist values	Materialist values
Quality of Life: Prioritise environmental protection, personal fulfillment, and self-expression.	Economic Security: Focus on economic growth, job security, and material well-being.
Social Equality: Emphasis on human rights, gender equality, and minority rights.	Physical Safety: Emphasis on maintaining law and order and national defense.
Individual Autonomy: Value independence, creativity, and personal freedom over authority.	Traditional Authority: Respect for established institutions and authority figures.
Progressive Change: Support for social change, progressive social policies and multiculturalism.	Community Stability: Preference for social stability, cultural homogeneity, and conservative values.
Globalism: Preference for international cooperation and a cosmopolitan worldview.	Nationalism: Emphasis on national pride and protecting national interests.

Younger graduates also tend to take considerably more **liberal** positions on social issues, such as immigration and crime, than more **authoritarian** non-graduates.

Libertarian	Authoritarian
Individual freedom, less government interference	Strong regulation of personal behaviour & morality
Emphasis on personal freedom and autonomy	Emphasis on law & order, with strict enforcement
Support individual expression & diverse lifestyles	Support for traditional values and social norms
Strong support for free speech and open dialogue	Preference for censorship to maintain social order
Globalism and support for multiculturalism	Nationalism & preference for cultural homogeneity
Minimal state involvement in international conflicts	Support for strong military and defense

This is significant because, in recent years, social issues like immigration have become increasingly **salient** - more prominent in shaping opinions. The National Centre for Social Research's annual British Attitudes Survey has shown that finding out where a voter falls on the libertarian-authoritarian scale has become as strong an indicator of party support as finding out whether they have left or right-wing economic views.

**Combined Labour, Lib Dem and Green support is now...**



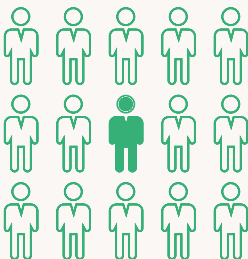


**37 points**  
higher among  
left-wing voters

**42 points**  
higher among  
libertarians

Party support has also become more strongly related to specific issues associated with the libertarian-authoritarian dimension. For example, the 2024 BSA found that:

- Those who thought migrants undermined Britain’s culture were 33 points more likely to support the Conservatives or Reform UK. (Up from 16 points in 2015)
- Those who thought that migrants enrich Britain’s culture were 48 points more likely to support Labour, the Lib Dems or the Greens. (Up from 21 points in 2015).
- Those who are ‘very proud’ of Britain’s history are 40 points more likely, than those who are ‘not very’ or ‘not at all’ proud, to support the Conservatives or Reform UK/ UKIP (up from 21 points in 2013).
- Those who think that equal opportunities for lesbian, gay and bisexual people have not gone far enough are 37 points more likely than those who believe they have gone too far to support Labour, the Greens or the Lib Dems (almost double the equivalent figure of 20 points in 2013.)

# Summary of factors that explain this education gap:

	<p><b>Growth of higher education:</b> The UK's shift from industries like mining and manufacturing to white-collar services increased the demand for a more educated workforce. In 1999, New Labour set a goal for over 50% of young people to attend university, aiming to equip the workforce for a new knowledge-based economy. Only around 20% of voters were university graduates in 2001, but this figure has already risen to approximately 33% in 2024.</p>
	<p><b>Post-materialist values:</b> Older generations, shaped by the hardships of the Great Depression &amp; WWII, prioritised materialist values of economic security, respect for authority, and tradition. But the more prosperous, peace-time generation of the 1960s, particularly graduates, began to embrace post-materialist values of individual freedom, social justice, and tolerance, reflecting their greater sense of security and exposure to diverse ideas.</p>
	<p><b>Self-selection:</b> Research suggests that universities often attract young people who are already inclined toward liberal and post-materialist values, largely shaped by their upbringing. Children of liberal parents, who prioritise self-expression and personal autonomy, are more likely to pursue higher education. Conversely, young people from backgrounds that emphasise economic security and stability might opt to directly enter the workforce.</p>
	<p><b>Socialisation:</b> Students who relocate from their hometowns to attend university in densely populated, diverse cities often become more liberal during their studies, particularly those studying the arts, humanities, and social sciences, where they are exposed to diverse perspectives and taught by professors who, surveys suggest, often hold more liberal cultural attitudes than individuals in equivalent senior positions in other professions.</p>
	<p><b>Distinct economic interests:</b> Globalisation can impact graduates and non-graduates in different ways. While graduates employed in well-paying, globalised industries might benefit from expanded career opportunities, higher salaries, and access to international markets, non-graduates in economically deprived areas, who face the outsourcing of local jobs to other markets, might prefer protectionist policies that focus on preserving local jobs.</p>



**Education as identity:** Graduates often see their educational achievements as a core part of their identity, and are more likely to identify as middle class & European. Non-graduates are more likely to identify as working-class and to hold stronger local or national identities, identifying as English or British. After the 2016 EU referendum, which had a clear educational divide, graduates & non-graduates often identified as 'Remain' or 'Leave' voters.



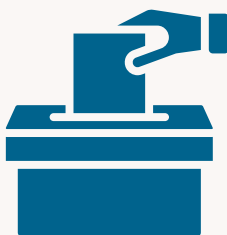
**Imbalance in representation:** As the parties professionalised in the 80s and 90s, they became increasingly dominated by career politicians with academic backgrounds. Critics argue that this has led to a more homogeneous political class that largely reflects the values of the more educated elite - as captured by the fact that only around 25% of MPs openly supported 'Leave' during the 2016 EU referendum, compared to 75% of voters without qualifications.



**Increasing salience of social issues:** In recent general elections (and the 2016 EU referendum), social issues like immigration and national identity have proven to be even more salient than economic issues for many voters. But whereas left-right economic issues tend to divide voters by social class and economic circumstances, social issues are tied to education, which strongly predicts where a voter falls on the libertarian-authoritarian scale.



**Mobilisation of social identities** - Parties have increasingly mobilised social identities and values to appeal to specific demographics on each side of the education divide. The Green Party's environmental policies have garnered strong support from post-materialist graduates, while Reform UK's pledge to voice the concerns of 'ordinary people' on social issues like immigration, has resonated with many working-class voters and non-graduates.



**Participation and Trust Gap:** Graduates are more likely to vote and engage in political activities than non-graduates. Ipsos MORI estimates that around 61% of voters with degrees participated in the 2024 General Election, compared with 53% of voters without qualifications. This differential turnout further amplifies the political influence of graduates and widens the representation gap, potentially undermining trust in the political system.



## 2) Age and Gender

	Lab	Con	Lib Dem	Reform	Green	SNP/PC	Other
<b>Gender</b>							
<b>Male</b>	34%	23%	12%	17%	7%	4%	3%
<b>Female</b>	35%	26%	13%	13%	7%	4%	3%
<b>Age</b>							
<b>18-24</b>	41%	5%	16%	8%	20%	5%	5%
<b>25-34</b>	47%	10%	11%	13%	12%	3%	4%
<b>35-44</b>	41%	17%	13%	14%	7%	3%	5%
<b>45-54</b>	36%	22%	14%	17%	6%	2%	3%
<b>55-64</b>	32%	27%	12%	19%	4%	3%	3%
<b>65+</b>	23%	43%	12%	14%	2%	4%	1%

Source: Ipsos MORI

Age also had a strong link to voting behaviour in 2024, which likely reflects the fact that younger voters are more likely to have attended university than older voters, and are more likely to have more liberal social views. Like graduates, younger voters were more likely to vote Labour, Liberal Democrat or Green, while older voters were more likely to vote for the Conservatives or Reform UK. However, increased third party support impacted both main parties. Labour's vote share fell 21 points among 18-24 year olds, while the Greens saw a 16 point increase. The Conservative's vote share fell, while Reform UK's increased, across all age groups.

In contrast, the gender gap was quite narrow and some small differences could also be linked to education because, for many years now, women have been much more likely than men to go to university. While Labour had similar support from men and women aged 25 and over, its support was higher amongst 18-24 year women than men.

## 3) Social Class:

	Lab	Con	Lib Dem	Reform	Green	SNP/PC	Other
<b>Social Class</b>							
<b>AB</b>	36%	26%	17%	9%	7%	2%	2%
<b>C1</b>	36%	25%	13%	12%	8%	2%	3%
<b>C2</b>	31%	25%	10%	25%	5%	4%	2%
<b>DE</b>	32%	26%	10%	17%	5%	5%	4%

Source: Ipsos MORI

Decades ago, social class had one of the strongest links to voting behaviour, with a clear majority of working class voters supporting Labour, and a majority of middle class voters supporting the Conservatives. Today, the picture is quite different. The main parties had quite similar levels of support across all social grades, and Labour had slightly higher support from AB voters (higher/ intermediate managers and professionals) and C1 voters (supervisors, clerical, junior managers). In contrast, Reform UK had its strongest support from C2 (skilled working-class) and DE voters (Semi-skilled and unskilled manual workers and voters dependent on state benefits).

## 4) Ethnicity

	Lab	Con	Lib Dem	Reform	Green	SNP/PC	Other
Ethnic group							
White (inc white minority groups)	33%	26%	13%	16%	6%	4%	2%
All ethnic minorities	46%	17%	8%	3%	11%	1%	13%
Asian	39%	18%	8%	3%	11%	1%	20%
Black	68%	16%	6%	1%	8%	1%	1%
Mixed	50%	14%	11%	7%	13%	3%	2%

Source: Ipsos MORI

While it maintained a strong lead, Labour's support from ethnic minority voters fell by 18-points from 2019, which translated into increases for the Green Party (up 9 points) and other third party and independent candidates (up 13 points). Having historically had strong support in constituencies with larger Muslim populations, Labour lost votes to third party and independent candidates who challenged its stance on the ongoing Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and who advocated for Palestinian interests.

## 5) EU Referendum and 2019 GE Vote

	Lab	Con	Lib Dem	Reform	Green	SNP/PC	Other
2019 Vote							
Labour	71%	2%	9%	4%	9%	1%	5%
Conservative	12%	53%	7%	24%	2%	*	2%
Liberal Democrat	31%	8%	49%	3%	7%	1%	1%
EU Referendum vote							
Remain	46%	18%	17%	3%	8%	5%	3%
Leave	19%	38%	7%	29%	3%	2%	2%
Did not vote	40%	18%	11%	16%	7%	5%	4%
EU Referendum vote by 2019 vote							
2019 Con leaver	11%	50%	5%	31%	2%	*	1%
2019 Con remainer	15%	64%	11%	7%	2%	*	2%
2019 Lab leaver	67%	4%	5%	12%	6%	*	6%
2019 Lab remainer	73%	1%	9%	2%	9%	1%	3%

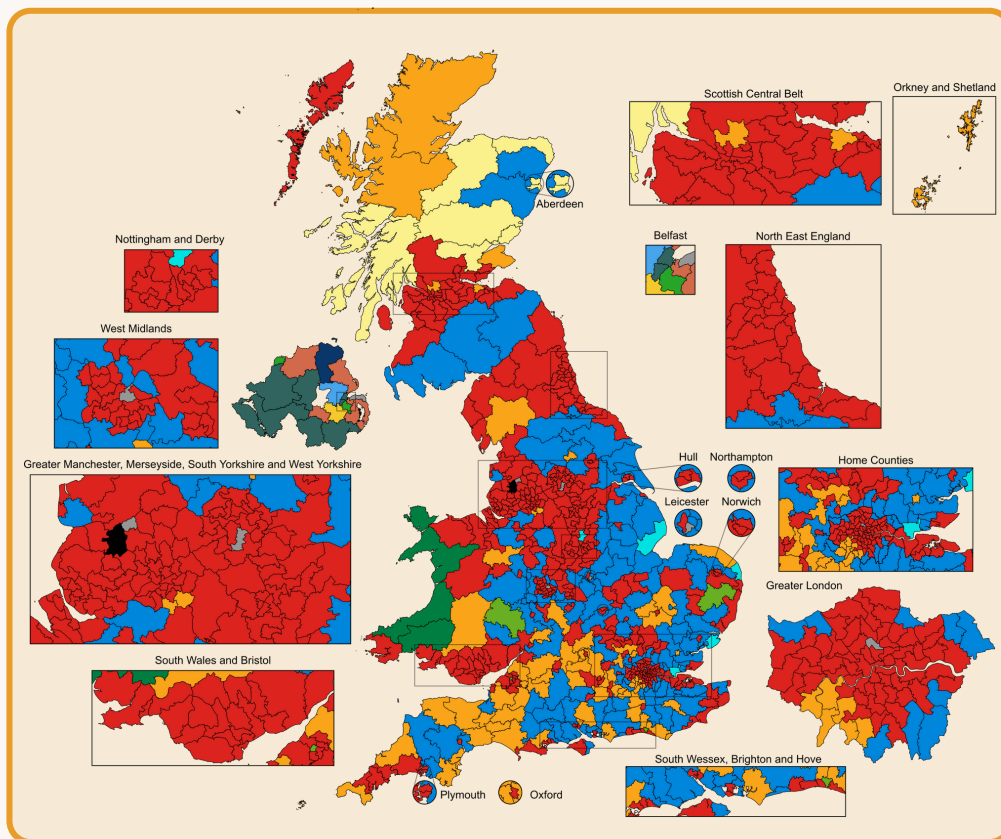
Source: Ipsos MORI

The Conservatives lost almost half of their 2019 vote, losing 12% to Labour and 7% to the Liberal Democrats, but far more (24%) to Reform UK. The party's support from 2016 Leave voters also halved, with some voting Labour, but most voting Reform UK.

Labour held on to 71% of its 2019 vote - it gained a large number of 2019 Lib Dem voters, but also lost voters to the Lib Dems (9%), Greens (9%) and Reform UK (4%). Labour remained by far the most popular choice for 2016 Remain voters.



## 6) Region









Historically, regional voting patterns in UK general elections were heavily influenced by economic and class divisions, with the North being more industrial and working-class, and therefore traditionally Labour-leaning, and the South, particularly the Southeast, more affluent and Conservative-leaning. However, with social issues and educational divisions now exerting considerably more influence over voting behaviour, recent general elections have instead become characterised by a new divide. While cities and university towns in both the north and south, which have a higher proportion of young university graduates, have tended to vote Labour, Liberal Democrat and Green, more rural areas and small 'left-behind' towns tend to have a higher proportion of older, non-graduates, who are more likely to vote for the Conservatives or Reform UK.

However, to say that there is now an **urban-rural** divide perhaps oversimplifies the complex voting map in 2024. As you can see from the map above, Labour performed extremely well in densely populated urban constituencies, winning many seats in cities like London, Manchester and Liverpool. The party also benefited from a sharp drop in support for the SNP in Scotland, where it gained 36 seats. The Liberal Democrats won most of their seats in the south-east of England, in constituencies that, while often quite rural, tend to have a higher than average proportion of professional graduates, and lower levels of deprivation. The Green Party won two seats in Bristol Central and Brighton Pavilion - both of which have young, socially progressive populations, but also two rural seats previously held by the Conservatives - Waveney Valley and North Herefordshire - following a campaign that focussed heavily on public services and environmental issues. In contrast, Reform UK's five seats all came from largely working class towns that have older, less-educated, Leave voting populations than average.

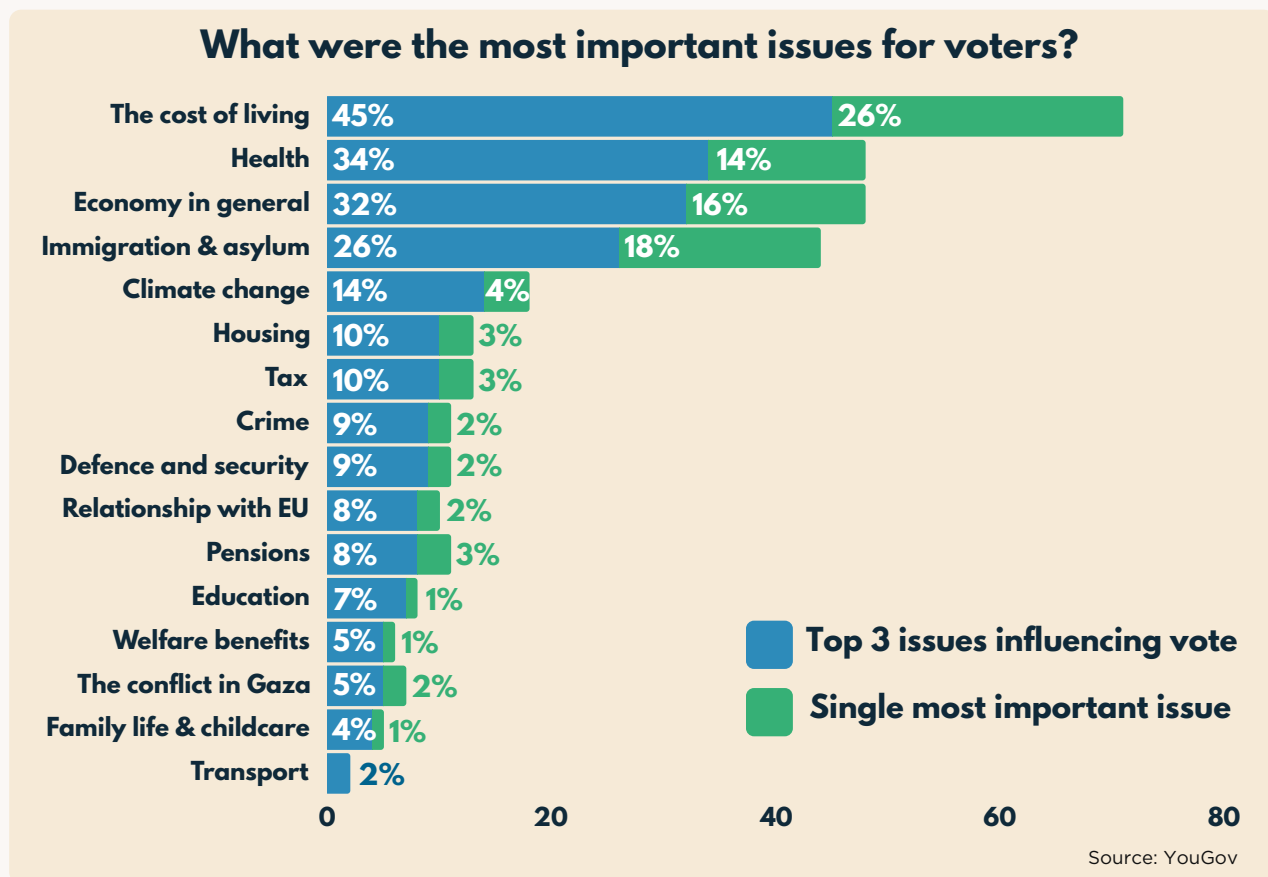
# How did short-term factors shape the 2024 vote?

## 1) Context and background:

In the 2019 General Election, the Conservatives secured a decisive victory by building a new coalition of voters that included not only traditional conservative supporters, but also many working-class constituencies in the "Red Wall" — Labour strongholds in the North of England and the Midlands. The Conservatives promised these 'Leave' voting constituencies that they would 'Get Brexit Done' and 'level-up' towns that had been left-behind by globalisation, by reducing regional disparities in employment rates, pay, health and education. However, by 2024, a series of events, crises, and scandals had exposed deep fractures within the party's coalition, with both 'Red Wall' and traditional Conservatives beginning to waiver. Key 2019-24 events included:

	<b>COVID-19 pandemic:</b> The COVID-19 pandemic had a profound impact on the UK's finances, leading to significant government borrowing and record high NHS waiting lists. The "Partygate" scandal, where senior officials were found to have breached lockdown rules, also led to PM Boris Johnson's resignation.
	<b>Russian invasion of Ukraine:</b> With UK inflation already rising due to the economic impact of COVID-19, Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022 further drove up global energy and food prices, placing additional pressure on household budgets. The Government faced increasing pressure to handle this growing 'cost of living crisis'.
	<b>Liz Truss's 'mini-budget':</b> After becoming PM in 2022, Liz Truss announced tax cuts and spending plans that swiftly led to a loss of market confidence. Interest rates and mortgage costs surged, further increasing the cost of living. Truss resigned after 44 days, leaving her party's economic reputation significantly damaged.
	<b>Record high immigration:</b> Despite promises that Brexit would allow the UK to "take back control" of its borders, immigration levels continued to rise. The Government's plan to deport asylum seekers to Rwanda faced legal challenges and failed to materialise, further undermining confidence in its immigration policies.
	<b>Brexit fallout:</b> Brexit continued to create challenges, with debates over trade disruptions, supply chain issues, and the Northern Ireland Protocol. While some viewed Brexit as having achieved its promises of sovereignty, others emphasised the ongoing economic and logistical difficulties it had introduced.
	<b>Public Services and Strikes:</b> Growing concerns over funding for public services led to widespread dissatisfaction and a series of strikes. Workers in sectors such as the NHS and education went on strike, with doctors and teachers raising issues related to pay, working conditions, and morale in the public sector.

## 2) Issues:



While respondents to a YouGov survey identified a wide range of issues influencing their vote, four issues were clearly the most salient: 1) the cost of living; 2) health; 3) the economy in general; and 4) immigration and asylum.

However, the priority given to these four issues varied greatly depending on which party the respondent was planning to vote for. The cost of living was most commonly cited as the single most important issue for Labour voters (36%), with immigration the main priority for only 3%. Likewise, while Lib Dem voters were slightly more divided between the cost of living (25%), health (24%), and the economy (20%) - only 5% cited immigration as their main concern.

In contrast, immigration was the single most important issue for 27% of Conservatives, followed by the economy (23%). A remarkable 68% of Reform UK's supporters said that immigration was the top issue, distantly followed by the cost of living (8%). Distinct issues were also cited by different generations. While older voters were more likely to cite immigration, defence and national security, younger generations cited the growing cost of living and environmental and climate change concerns.

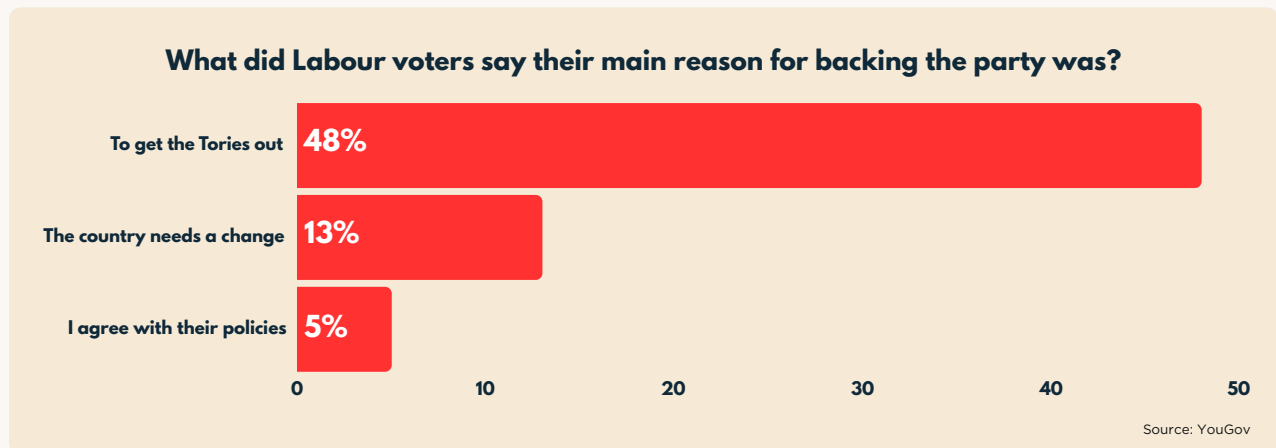
Overall, the top four issues created significant challenges for the Conservative Government, which had to account for: persistently high inflation, which had greatly squeezed household budgets; record NHS waiting lists, which continued to exceed 6 million patients; sluggish economic growth and an increasing public debt; and record high immigration levels, with net migration figures surpassing 600,000 in 2023.

As you can see from the tables below, each of the 2024 party manifestos had a mixed reception, with some policies polling significantly better than others. In terms of economic policy, majorities generally supported plans to: spend more on public services; reduce taxes on lower income groups; increase taxes on the wealthy; and expand home ownership. In terms of social policy, majorities supported plans to: limit immigration; punish low-level anti-social behaviour; and establish that sex based legal rights apply specifically to “biological sex”, as opposed to gender identity. However, majorities also opposed plans to: introduce national service; leave the European Court of Human Rights; and scrap net zero emissions targets and nuclear energy.

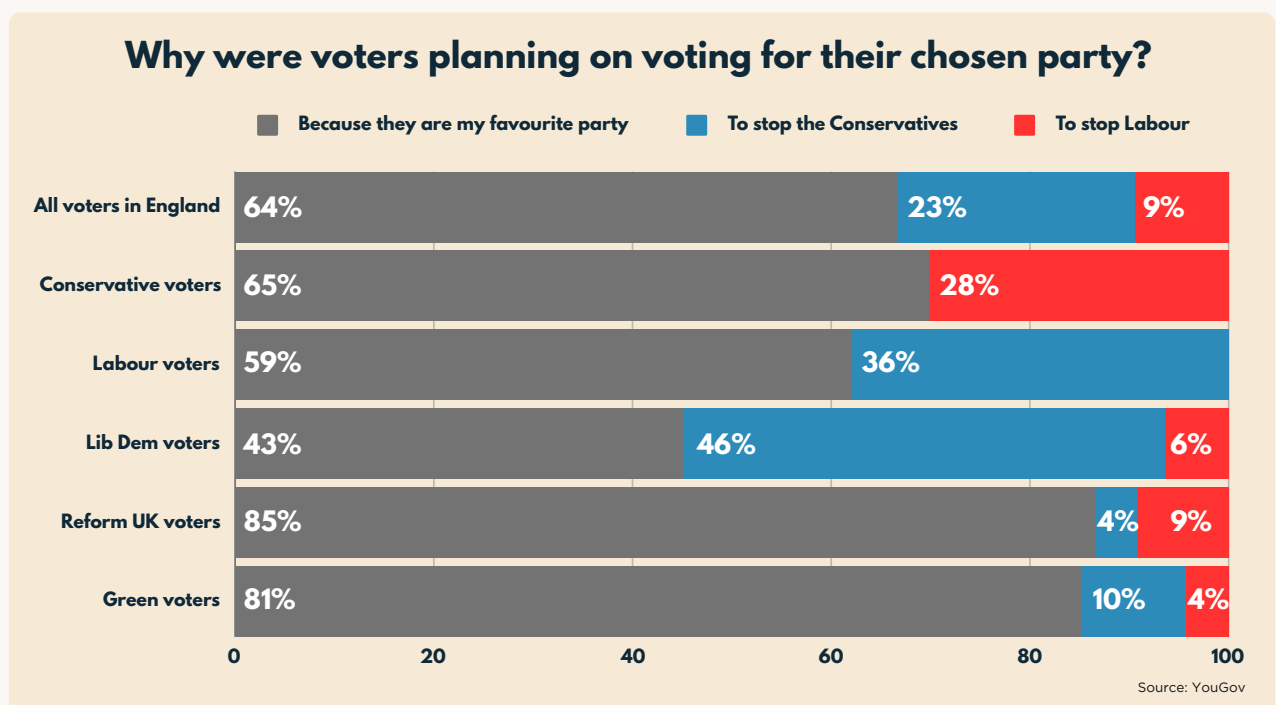
Conservative Manifesto	73% supported an increase in income-tax thresholds for pensioners
	65% supported a new annual cap on migrant visas
	58% supported low level offenders (e.g anti-social behaviour) receiving points on their driving licence
	50% supported plans to establish that sex based legal rights apply specifically to "biological sex"
	52% opposed plans to introduce national service for 18 year olds
Labour Manifesto	75% supported proposals to create a publicly owned renewable energy provider
	64% supported plans to use private sector capacity to tackle NHS waiting lists
	60% supported plans to charge VAT on private school fees
	46% supported & 39% opposed plans to scrap the scheme to send asylum seekers to Rwanda
	60% opposed plans for a reduction in the voting age to 16
Lib Dem Manifesto	90% supported a new legal right to see a GP within 7 days, or within 24 hours if urgent
	88% supported free personal care to elderly and disabled adults at home
	84% supported a 16% tax on water company profits to fund cleaning up rivers
	61% supported increasing minimum wage by 20% for those on zero-hour contracts
	51% supported allowing asylum seekers to work after their first three months in the country
Reform Manifesto	74% supported an increase in the starting threshold for income tax to £20,000
	59% supported returning migrants crossing the channel in small boats to France
	55% supported a freeze on all 'non-essential' immigration
	51% opposed scrapping net zero carbon emission targets
	51% opposed plans to leave the European Court of Human Rights
Green Manifesto	76% supported increasing the minimum wage to £15 an hour
	71% supported a 1% tax on assets over £10 million and 2% tax on assets over £1 billion
	59% supported scrapping tuition fees for university students
	49% supported a ban on domestic flights for journeys that would take less than 3 hours by train
	48% opposed plans to phase out nuclear energy

Source: YouGov

Other polls indicated that while voters were critical of both main party manifestos, Labour's was viewed more favourably. While 57% believed the Conservatives' policies to be "unaffordable," this fell to 47% for Labour. Similarly, 62% said the Conservatives' policies were "unrealistic," compared to 47% for Labour. Additionally, 52% considered the Conservative manifesto "bad for Britain," while only 35% said the same of Labour's.



Overall, we should be cautious before concluding that Labour won on the strength of its manifesto. As the table above shows, a remarkable 61% of Labour voters said that their main motivation for voting Labour was either to 'get the Tories out', or simply to bring about a change in government. Only 5% mentioned the Labour Party's policies.



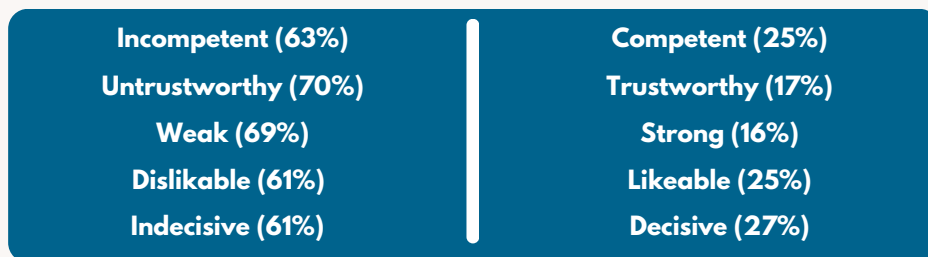
We also need to factor in **tactical voting** - the fact that, in order to avoid wasting their vote on a favourite party that has little chance of winning, some voters will have instead voted for the candidate most likely to defeat their least favoured option. While over 80% of Reform UK and Green voters said that they were voting for their favourite party, over 46% of Liberal Democrat voters and 36% of Labour voters described their vote as a tactical effort to prevent the Conservatives from winning a seat. Likewise, over 28% of Conservative voters supported the party not because they considered their policies to be the best, but as a means to prevent Labour from winning.

### 3) Party leaders

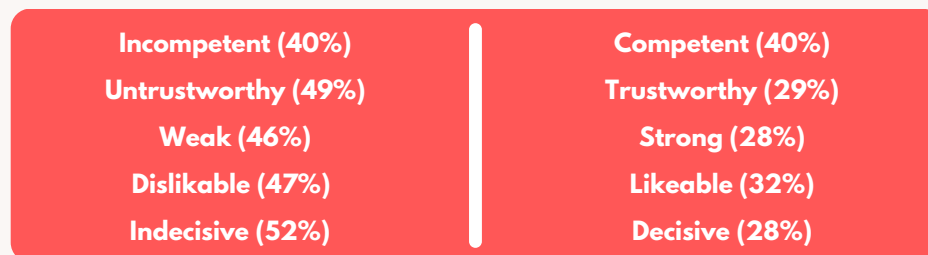
Throughout the campaign, both main party leaders struggled with poor approval ratings. Rishi Sunak faced particularly dire numbers in YouGov polls, with 75% holding an unfavourable view, giving him a lower net favourability than was ever reached by former Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn, or Conservative Prime Minister Boris Johnson.

While Keir Starmer fared better, he was still viewed unfavourably by 52% of the public, and his performance failed to improve over the course of the campaign. However, Starmer did outperform Sunak in July YouGov polls asking about their key attributes:

#### Rishi Sunak



#### Keir Starmer



Third party leaders also played a memorable role in the 2024 General Election:

Lib Dem leader Ed Davey used attention grabbing stunts, from bungee-jumping and paddle boarding to Zumba dancing, to raise his party's profile. However, while the percentage of voters with a favourable view of Davey rose from 15% to 30% over the course of the campaign, it is unclear whether this achieved his desired goal. One YouGov poll found that, when asked what they most remembered about the Lib Dem's campaign, only 3% recalled the party's flagship social care policies.



The announcement that former UKIP leader Nigel Farage would resume leadership of Reform UK and stand for Parliament, also had a significant impact. YouGov polls found that, following Farage's announcement, the proportion of those considering a vote for Reform UK who were now completely certain jumped from 45% to 54%. However, Farage remained a polarising figure with voters - while 27% said that he would be a good or great Prime Minister, 55% said that he would be bad or terrible.



## 4) The campaign

Former Prime Minister Rishi Sunak had until 17th December 2024 to call a general election. Ahead of his announcement, on 22nd May, that the election would take place on 4th July, there had been a growing expectation that the Prime Minister would wait until the autumn, to give the economy more time to show signs of improvement. Sunak's announcement of a summer election was widely seen as a gamble that would ultimately not pay off.



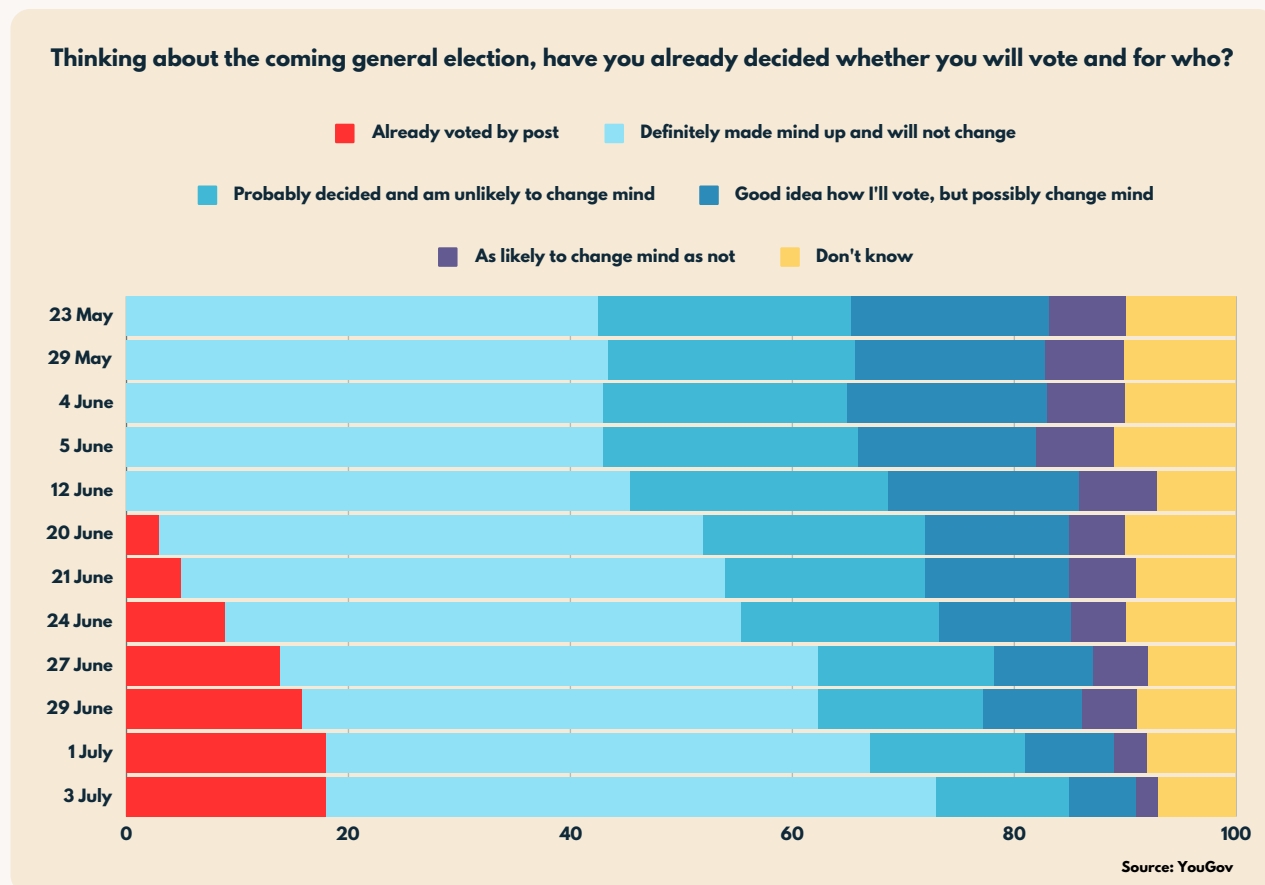
Numerous theories were advanced to explain Sunak's decision. Some suggested that with inflation having finally hit the Government's 2% target, Sunak hoped to claim that his economic plan was working, even if voters had yet to feel the benefits. Others suggested that the announcement was intended to catch Labour and Reform UK by surprise. However, while Labour had many candidates to select it was well-prepared, and, after initially declining to stand, former UKIP leader Nigel Farage quickly resumed leadership of Reform UK, drawing significant attention and support away from the Conservatives. Some speculated that, despite being 20 points behind in the polls, Sunak calculated that his party would face an even greater challenge in the Autumn, particularly if the economic situation worsened or small boat crossings continued.

Either way, the Conservative campaign would go on to be called the "worst campaign in my lifetime" by one anonymous senior party figure. Firstly, the party announced a flagship policy that would prove to be one of its most unpopular with voters - the idea of introducing a form of national service, in which 18-year-olds would choose either community volunteering, in organisations such as the NHS and fire service, or military training. Secondly, the campaign attracted a series of negative news stories - from the allegations that Conservative candidates and officials had used insider information to place bets on the date of the election, to extensive coverage of Sunak's decision to leave D-Day commemorations early in order to attend a TV interview. Thirdly, as the polls continued to raise the prospect of a historic defeat, the party switched from asking voters to return it to power, to the more defeatist line of asking voters to deny Labour a 'supermajority'. It claimed that a vote for Reform UK, which was almost tied with the Conservatives in the polls, would only hand even greater power to Labour.

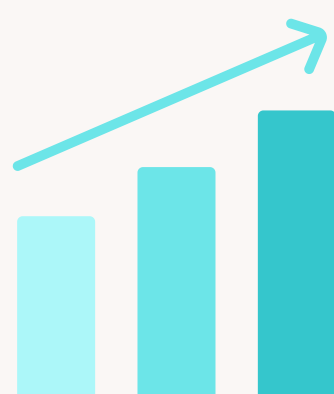
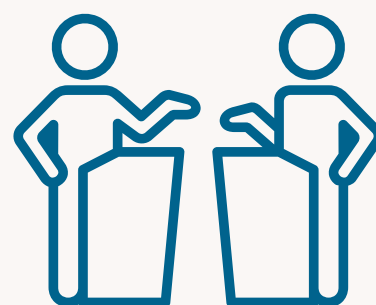


Having entered the election campaign with such a large lead in the polls, Labour pursued what many dubbed a 'Ming vase strategy'. Much like someone carefully carrying a delicate Ming vase across a slippery floor, the party took a highly cautious approach, avoiding bold policies or controversial statements that could "shatter" their lead. This was reflected in the party's slogan, which was simply an offer of "Change" from the unpopular incumbent Government. While the strategy worked in some ways, it failed to enthuse many voters, and may have contributed to the election's low turnout. The lack of detailed policy debate was also criticised by groups like the Institute for Fiscal Studies, which accused the main parties of a 'conspiracy of silence' over the difficult tax and spending choices they faced.

It is unclear how much the campaigns influenced voting behaviour, because there were few undecided voters when they began. Even on 23rd May, around 65% of voters had either 'definitely' made up their mind, or were 'unlikely' to change their mind, and a further 18% had a 'good idea' of how they would vote. Only 7% said that they were 'as likely to change their mind as not', while a further 10% 'didn't know'.



While there were a variety of high-profile televised debates, including head-to-head debates between Rishi Sunak and Keir Starmer, and multi-party debates that also included third party leaders, they appeared to have little effect on the polls. The short, soundbite-driven format of the debates limited in-depth policy discussions, and both major parties adopted cautious, risk-averse strategies.



One party that did see an upward trend in the polls during the campaign was Reform UK. Initially polling at around 11%, the party's support rose to around 16% following Nigel Farage's return as leader. A YouGov poll announced on 13th June even put Reform UK a point ahead of the Conservatives, leading Farage to suggest that he had become the "leader of the opposition". However, this upward trajectory appeared to stall following a BBC interview in which Farage argued that the eastward expansion of the EU and NATO had "provoked" Russia's 2022 invasion and the ongoing war in Ukraine.

## 5) The media

YouGov conducted a survey in which it asked voters to list the news stories they remembered the most from each party's campaign.

**14%**

The top answer for the Conservative Party was the story that several Conservative candidates and officials were being investigated for allegedly betting on the date of the General Election using 'insider information'.

**8%**

Another top response for the Conservative Party was the story that Prime Minister Rishi Sunak had been pressured to apologise for leaving D-Day commemorations in France early to fly home for a campaign interview.

**17%**

The best known campaign event for Reform UK was the story that Nigel Farage would be taking over as leader, and running as MP for Clacton. A further 12% cited reports about the party's tough immigration policies.

**9%**

The next most commonly cited stories for Reform UK were allegations of racism within the party, and reports that a Reform UK activist had been secretly filmed making racist comments.

**7%**

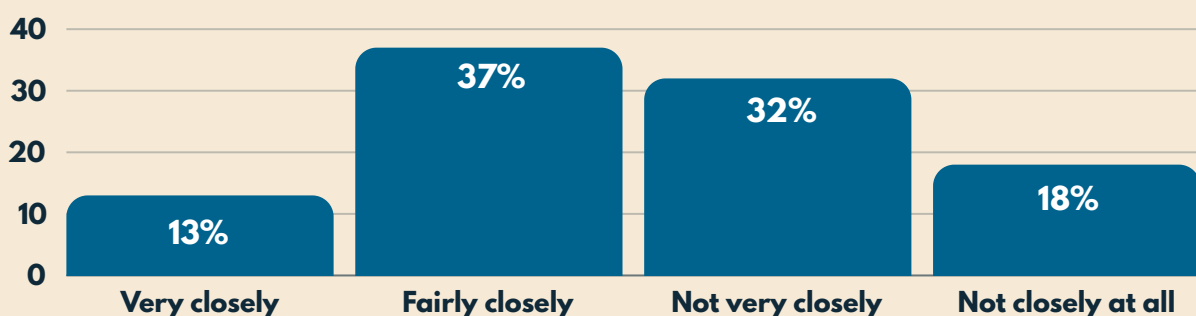
There were few stand-out stories from Labour's campaign. Most respondents cited speculation over Labour's tax plans, while a further 6% mentioned Labour's campaign slogan of offering 'change'.

**37%**

The Lib Dem campaign was overwhelmingly remembered for leader Ed Davey's various campaign stunts. Davey attempted to draw attention to his party by paddleboarding, slip 'n' sliding, bungee jumping and Zumba dancing.








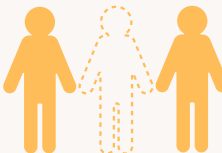
The survey arguably showed how little attention was given to the campaigns, or at least how unmemorable they were - the combined percentage of respondents who said that 'no story stood out', or that they 'avoided the news' was high for each party - Conservatives (38%), Reform UK (32%), Labour (45%), Liberal Democrat (53%). Other polls showed that only around 13% of voters were following the media's election coverage "very closely", with half of voters not following it "very/closely at all".

How closely, if at all, have you been following news around the 2024 General Election campaign?



Source: YouGov

## Summary: The 2024 General Election

	<b>Context:</b> The Conservative Party's 2019 success was driven by a new coalition, including "Red Wall" voters, through promises to "Get Brexit Done" and "level up" neglected regions. However, subsequent issues, including the pandemic, economic challenges, and rising immigration, had eroded the party's support by 2024.
	<b>Outcome:</b> The Conservatives suffered its worst defeat, losing 251 seats, while the SNP lost 39 of its 48 Scottish seats. Labour won a decisive victory, but with fewer votes than it received in 2019 & 2017, following a sharp drop in turnout, and record support for third parties, with the Liberal Democrats winning 72 seats.
	<b>Socio-demographic factors:</b> Education, and associated factors like age, continued to have strong links with voting behaviour. The Conservatives again performed best with non-graduates, although lost many to Reform UK. Likewise, while graduates preferred Labour, an increasing percentage also voted for the Green Party.
	<b>Issues:</b> Voters were divided over which issue was most salient. While the cost of living and public services were key for most Labour, Liberal Democrat and Green voters, immigration was the top concern for Conservative and Reform UK supporters. Overall, voters were very sceptical about both main party manifestos.
	<b>Valence:</b> Voters were critical of both main party leaders, with Labour's Starmer faring slightly better. Many Labour voters said they were largely motivated by the party's offer of 'change' from an incumbent Conservative Government that was considered to have a poor record of managing public services and immigration.
	<b>Campaign:</b> Having entered the campaign ahead, Labour pursued a 'Ming vase' strategy that failed to enthuse. After Nigel Farage's return, and a run of negative press coverage, the Conservatives asked voters to simply deny Labour a 'supermajority'. Ed Davey drew considerable attention, but not always to Lib Dem policies.
	<b>Electoral system:</b> FPTP impacted voting behaviour (many third party supporters voted tactically), and produced the most disproportionate outcome in history - Labour and the Lib Dems benefited from their efficiently distributed support, while Reform UK struggled to convert its 4.1 million votes into seats.
	<b>Turnout:</b> At just 59.8%, turnout was the second lowest in history. Polls pointing to a Labour landslide may have discouraged voters who saw the election as a foregone conclusion. While some disaffected 2019 Conservative voters switched parties, others, who were unconvinced by Labour, simply did not vote at all.