

## Links and Resources

- **Results of the local elections**

<https://www.theguardian.com/politics/ng-interactive/2025/may/01/local-elections-2025-full-mayoral-and-council-results-for-england>

- **Local Elections explained to kids** 😊

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/newsround/articles/ce82krln0wdo>

- **Nigel Farage's Reaction**

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OtCothhsAG0&ab\\_channel=SkyNews](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OtCothhsAG0&ab_channel=SkyNews)

- **The electoral maths: How Farage could win the next general election - An analysis by two editorialists from the Daily Telegraph**

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qhahyt6lLb8&ab\\_channel=TheTelegraph](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qhahyt6lLb8&ab_channel=TheTelegraph)

- **From absurdity and anger to hope in Reform UK's new heartland | Anywhere but Westminster – The Guardian video**

As Nigel Farage's party sweeps to victory in Lincolnshire, John Harris and John Domokos take a road trip through anger, sadness and fear – and, despite Reform's triumph, discover people working on a new politics of hope and common humanity

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SIRkps5J-sE&ab\\_channel=TheGuardian](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SIRkps5J-sE&ab_channel=TheGuardian)

### Nigel Farage takes aim at the U.K.'s dominant parties with hefty gains in local elections



Reform UK's Sarah Pochin, right, and party leader Nigel Farage talk to the media Friday.

(Peter Byrne / Associated Press)

**By Jill Lawless**

*The Los Angeles Times*, May 2, 2025

LONDON — The hard-right party Reform UK led by Nigel Farage snatched a seat in Parliament from the governing Labor Party and won hundreds of local council seats from the opposition Conservatives in elections that Farage hailed Friday as a turning point toward ending the two parties' political dominance.

Reform's Sarah Pochin was declared winner of the seat of Runcorn and Helsby in northwest England by six votes after a recount, defeating Labor candidate Karen Shore by the narrowest of margins.

It was a significant defeat for Labor, which easily won the district in last year's national election. The special election was held because Labor lawmaker Mike Amesbury was forced to quit after he was convicted of punching a constituent in a drunken rage.

Farage said that "it's a very, very big moment indeed" that shows Reform can win against both Labor and the right-of-center opposition Conservatives.

“This marks the end of two-party politics as we’ve known it for over a century,” he said.

The Runcorn victory gives Reform, which garnered about 14% of the vote in the 2024 national election, five of the 650 seats in the House of Commons, compared to 403 for Labor and 121 for the Conservatives.

But Reform appears to have momentum. National polls now suggest its support equals or surpasses that of Labor and the Conservatives, and it hopes to displace the Conservatives as the country’s main party on the right before the next national election, due by 2029.

### **A rebuff to Labor**

The local elections held Thursday in many areas of England were a sobering rebuff to Prime Minister Keir Starmer’s center-left Labor government, 10 months after it was elected in a landslide.

Farage’s party is targeting working-class voters who once backed Labor. Starmer’s popularity has plunged as his government struggles to kick-start a sluggish economy. The government has raised the minimum wage, strengthened workers’ rights and pumped money into the state-funded health system — but also hiked employer taxes and cut welfare benefits.

Starmer said that he understood why many voters are discontented.

“My response is: We get it,” he said. “I am determined that we will go further and faster on the change that people want to see.”

### **A blow to the Conservatives**

The results were an even bigger blow to the Conservatives, whose voters switched to Reform in droves.

Reform, which didn’t exist when these areas last voted four years ago, won more than 600 seats in the elections for 1,600 seats on 23 local councils, mostly at the Tories’ expense. Reform won control of several county-level local authorities, including previous Conservative strongholds Staffordshire and Lincolnshire in central England, Durham in the north and Farage’s home county of Kent in the southeast.

Farage told supporters that the Conservatives “are over, they are finished, they have literally been gutted in these counties.”

Reform candidate Andrea Jenkyns, a former Conservative lawmaker, was elected mayor of the Greater Lincolnshire region of east-central England, and Reform also took the mayoralty of neighboring Hull. Labor retained three other mayoralties and the Conservatives won one.

The victories will bring pressure for Reform to deliver on transport, garbage collection, potholes and all the other unglamorous demands of everyday politics.

Conservative leader Kemi Badenoch, who could now face a party revolt, said voters, who ejected the party from power last year, “are still not yet ready to trust us.”

### **Fragmented politics**

The results give only a partial snapshot of voter sentiment. Many areas, including London, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, didn’t hold elections. Turnout for local polls is typically much lower than in a national election.

And Reform isn’t the only story. The centrist Liberal Democrats made big gains in south and southwest England by winning more affluent, socially liberal voters away from the Conservatives.

Reform UK is the latest in a series of parties led by Farage, a veteran populist politician who was crucial in taking Britain out of the European Union through a 2016 referendum. He is a charismatic but divisive figure who has said that many migrants come to the U.K. from cultures “alien to ours.”

Reform blends Farage’s long-standing political themes — strong borders, curbing immigration — with policies reminiscent of U.S. President Trump’s administration. Farage said that he plans “a DOGE for every county” in England, inspired by Elon Musk’s contentious spending-slashing agency.

University of Strathclyde political scientist John Curtice said that the results showed that politics in Britain, long dominated by the two big parties, has fragmented.

“Reform is now posing a big threat to both Conservative and Labor,” he told the BBC.

As to whether two-party dominance will continue, “the question mark on that has just got three or four times bigger,” Curtice said.

*For Labour, it's a problem; for the Conservatives, an existential threat*



Photograph: Reuters

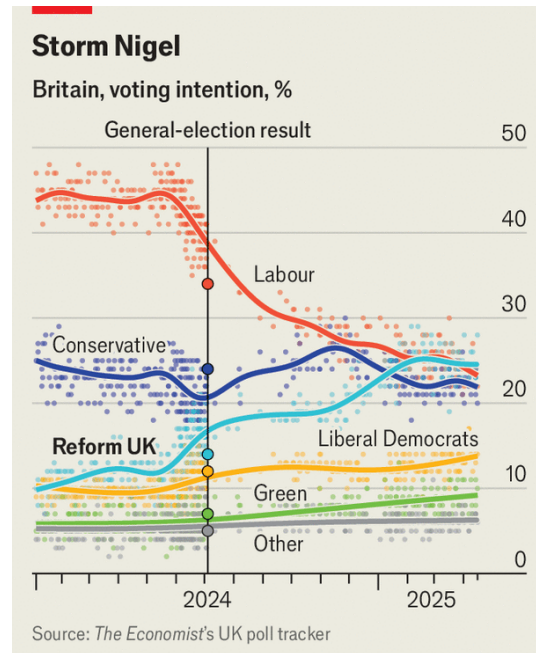


Chart: The Economist

*The Economist*, May 3rd 2025

A GRINNING NIGEL FARAGE held six fingers up for the camera. Six votes is not much of a majority, but it was enough for Mr Farage's Reform UK to beat Labour in a by-election for Runcorn and Helsby, a seat just outside Liverpool. What was once one of the safest Labour seats in the country fell to Mr Farage's party, in the most dramatic result in a swathe of elections that demonstrated Reform could win across the country and threaten both Labour and the Conservatives.

Until now, Reform's political impact had far outweighed its electoral impact. Mr Farage's team had topped the polls on and off since the start of the year; the local elections on May 1st were a chance to show that this surge was not just an artefact of polling. The party took it.

Runcorn was merely the cherry on top. The substance came elsewhere. Lincolnshire, the most right-wing part of England and once a fortress of Conservatism, gave Reform an overwhelming victory in its election for mayor. Reform also took control of Durham County Council, knocking over 38 Labour councillors in the process. Meanwhile, it hammered the Conservatives in the shires, taking control of Staffordshire. Lancashire, usually a fight between Labour and the Conservatives, is now Reform territory.

It was as bad as can be for the Conservative Party. Party officials had done their best to set expectations of an electoral apocalypse. It certainly met them. The party lost 676 councillors and 16 councils (out of the 23 contested). Kemi Badenoch, the Tory leader, has struggled since taking the role in November. Grumbling about her position as leader will only grow. At least one person is happy to keep her: "Kemi Badenoch, please stay," said Mr Farage in Runcorn. "Please don't resign."

Sir Ed Davey, the Liberal Democrat leader, may think similarly. While Mr Farage's gang devour one section of Conservative support, the Lib Dems feast on the other (helping them win the county councils of Cambridgeshire, Oxfordshire and Shropshire). The party attracts a fraction of the coverage of Reform. But its rise, if it continues, will prove just as consequential as Mr Farage's surge.

For Labour, things could have been worse. In 2021 the Conservatives lost Chesham and Amersham, one of their safest seats in one of England's loveliest corners, to the Liberal Democrats in a by-election. It was, however, a 20-point hammering, rather than six votes. The Lib Dems retained it at the last election. By contrast, Labour will be confident of winning Runcorn back during a national poll.

Labour also got lucky. First-past-the-post is now a slot machine: someone has to win the jackpot. Labour clung on in North Tyneside. It held on to the mayoralty in the West of England, the area around Bristol, in what was a genuine five-way competition, with only 25% of the vote. In Doncaster, Labour beat Reform by 698 votes, with 18,982 backing the Conservative candidate. Each mayor will have difficulty claiming to speak for their region. It is a foretaste of the next general election.

The elections, which took place predominantly in Conservative-leaning areas, broadly reflected the national polls, in which Labour is roughly level with the Conservatives. But a party plodding along in the low 20s is lucky to still be alive, never mind in government. How to recover will dominate internal Labour politics in the coming months. Runcorn summed up the dilemma: if Labour had wooed a few more Green voters, they would have held Runcorn. Some in the party think Sir Keir is ignoring these voters. But a few converts from Reform would have done the trick, too. A reshuffle of Sir Keir's cabinet is mooted. Ed Miliband, who is responsible for Net Zero, is a perennial target for those in the right of the party. In such confusing times, people in Labour will turn to their eternal enemy: other members of the Labour Party. Although local elections are widely read through the prism of national politics, they are actually about local government. Reform councillors now have the task of running some of Britain's broken councils, from Staffordshire to Durham. It is a close-to-impossible job. Councillors are stuck trying to fulfil mandatory obligations, such as care for the elderly, without the means to raise enough taxes themselves to pay for them. With little power comes great responsibility; in his career so far, Mr Farage has always enjoyed the opposite. Running a county is harder than it looks. Never mind a country. ■

### **Falsehoods fuelling the vote surge for Reform**

A lie, as everybody knew long before Facebook, gets halfway around the world before the truth has got its boots on

Emma Duncan

Monday May 05 2025, *The Times*

I had a conversation at the weekend in deepest Devon with a friend who is an enthusiastic Reform voter. "It's not my country any more," he said, citing stories told to him by recent arrivals in the village of asylum seekers in distant cities standing at school gates harassing children. (Police have investigated those stories and found no truth in them.) The only immigrants for miles are white people from Reading, London or thereabouts.

In the village hall that evening there was a VE Day party, with a swing band, lessons in 1940s dances and a "ration-book buffet" — a lot tastier than it sounded. It was a perfect piece of nostalgic patriotism, and a joyful celebration of my country and his.

Hostility to immigration isn't the only driver of the Reform vote but it's a big one. The fact that the party's recent surge has happened mostly in places where there aren't many immigrants leads me to suspect that it's fuelled less by people's experiences than by lies.

A lie, as everybody knew long before Facebook, gets halfway around the world before the truth has got its boots on, and social media has given wings to falsehoods.

### **News Analysis**

### **After 100 Years, Britain's Two-Party Political System May Be Crumbling**

*Nigel Farage's right-wing populist party, Reform U.K., is presenting a serious challenge to the governing Labour Party and to the opposition Conservatives.*

By Stephen Castle, Reporting from London *The New York Times*, May 4, 2025

A dramatic victory in a parliamentary special election. Hundreds of seats won in English municipalities. A first taste of power in the lower tiers of government.

By making extensive gains in a set of local elections held on Thursday in England, Nigel Farage, one of Britain's best known supporters of President Trump and the leader of the anti-immigration Reform U.K. party, consolidated his reputation as the country's foremost political disrupter.

But he may have done something bigger still: blown a hole in the country's two-party political system.

For nearly all of the past century, power in Britain has alternated between the governing Labour Party, now led by Prime Minister Keir Starmer, and the opposition

Conservatives, who last year selected a new leader, Kemi Badenoch.

Yet with surging support for Reform and gains for other small parties, that duopoly has rarely looked more shaky.

"The two main parties have been served notice of a potential eviction from their 100-year tenures of Downing Street," said Robert Ford, a professor of political science at the University of Manchester.

Still reeling after being ejected from power last year, the Conservatives suffered another disastrous set of results. With the economy flatlining, Labour was punished by voters angry with government spending curbs and higher taxes introduced since it came to power.

The electorate rejected both main parties, Professor Ford said, adding that, were a result like this to occur in a general election, “the Conservative Party would cease to exist as a meaningful force in Parliament.”

Image



Kemi Badenoch, the leader of the opposition Conservative Party. Still reeling after being ejected from power last year, the party just had another disastrous set of results. Credit...Ben Stansall/Agence France-Presse — Getty Images

Claire Ainsley, a former policy director for Mr. Starmer, said the results also reflected longer-term trends, including a breakdown of traditional class loyalties among voters, the increasing pull of nationalist politics and growing support for the centrist Liberal Democrats, the Greens and independent candidates.

“We have been seeing the fragmentation of society and that has flowed through to our politics,” said Ms. Ainsley, who now works in Britain for the Progressive Policy Institute, a Washington-based research institute. “There is multiparty voting now.”

The upshot is that both main parties are struggling as they find themselves competing not just with each other, but also with opponents to their political left and right. That mood of public disenchantment gave an opening to smaller parties, including the Liberal Democrats, who won 163 council seats, and the Greens, who gained 44. But the biggest beneficiary was Reform, whose supporters have been energized by Mr. Farage’s vigorous campaigning.

In an interview at a Reform U.K. rally in March, John McDermottroe, a party supporter, said many people in his region of Stockton-on-Tees, in northeastern England, felt that the Labour Party had “grown away from working people.”

As for Mr. Farage, “he is very charismatic, he communicates with people from every sector of life, he tells it as it is,” Mr. McDermottroe said.

The fragmentation Mr. Farage has unleashed on British politics was felt even in races Reform lost, including the mayoralty of a region known as the West of England.

Helen Godwin of Labour won that with just one-quarter of the vote, putting her only slightly ahead of Reform U.K., while even the fifth-placed party won 14 percent of the vote.

Fewer than one-third of eligible voters cast a ballot, the kind of low turnout that is common in local elections. But that meant Ms. Godwin was elected by just 7.5 percent of eligible voters, Gavin Barwell, a former chief of staff in Downing Street and member of the opposition Conservative Party, noted on social media, adding that there was a “collapse” of the two-party political system. That may yet prove an exaggeration.

Because of a reorganization, the number of seats contested in Thursday’s local elections was the smallest since 1975, and voter turnout is always low in such races.

Britain’s next general election — when that proposition will be tested properly — does not have to be held until 2029, and previous challenges to two-party dominance have faded.

In the early 1980s, the Social Democratic Party, founded by disenchanted moderates from the Labour Party, promised to “break the mold” of British politics. In alliance with another centrist party, it briefly exceeded 50 percent in an opinion poll. That proved a false dawn. Yet with five parties now vying for votes in a system that suited two, British politics has become deeply unpredictable.

Born out of the trade union movement, Labour was once seen as the party of the working class, with its heartlands in the industrial north and middle of the nation. Traditionally, the Conservatives represented the wealthy and middle classes, with support concentrated predominantly in the south.

The loosening of those ties had already weakened the grip of the two main parties. In last year’s general election, the combined vote for Labour and the Conservatives fell below 60 percent for the first time since before 1922, and Labour’s landslide victory was achieved on just about 34 percent of the vote. In Scotland, the pro-independence Scottish National Party has reshaped politics.

Mr. Starmer now faces a conundrum: If Labour tacks right to appease Mr. Farage’s sympathizers, it risks losing support from its progressive base to the Liberal Democrats or the Greens.

Ms. Ainsley said Labour faced “an enormous challenge” in the context of a tight squeeze on government spending, but added that it must focus on



delivering for voters still suffering from a jump in the cost of living.

The Conservatives face an even bigger threat from Reform, as well as their own challenge. The Tories need to recapture voters who have shifted to Mr. Farage without moving so far to the right that they drive more liberal Tories to the centrist Liberal Democrats.

Political scientists also say that a shift is underway that could transform the fortunes of Reform, taking what has been a protest party and turning it into a force that could make good on its ambition to replace the Conservatives as the main opposition party.

Britain's parliamentary elections operate under a system known as "first past the post," in which the candidate who wins the most votes in each of 650 constituencies is elected. Until now, that has typically disadvantaged smaller parties.

"When it was just the Lib Dems trying to break the Labour-Tory duopoly, a rough rule of thumb was that they, and their predecessor parties, needed at least 30

percent to overcome the biases inherent in first past the post," wrote Peter Kellner, a polling expert.

With more parties in contention and no dominant force, the calculations are changing. "The tipping point for a party such as Reform is no longer 30 percent. It's probably around 25 percent. That is where they stand in the polls," he added.

Professor Ford said he agreed that something fundamental was shifting and that Reform was now "doing well enough for first past the post to cease being their enemy and to become their friend."

After the latest election results, Professor Ford said, it is "a lot easier for Nigel Farage to say 'We are the real party of opposition,' and it's harder for people to laugh when he says it."

**Stephen Castle** is a London correspondent of The Times, writing widely about Britain, its politics and the country's relationship with Europe.

### Had elections been held everywhere, Reform would have come top

When experts crunched the numbers and extrapolated from the 2021 and 2024 results to calculate a 'national equivalent vote' there was a clear winner

Colin Rallings | Michael Thrasher? Sunday May 04 2025, *The Sunday Times*

The tectonic plates of English politics profoundly shifted last week but it is unclear how far the aftershocks will spread or how long they will last.

A disenchanted electorate took revenge on the two parties that have governed the country for a century and in large numbers opted for the alternative on offer on both left and right. The Tories knew what was coming given that the local seats they were defending were last contested at a high point for the party in 2021. Labour had less to lose but saw its support plunge in many of the areas where it had racked up gains at last year's general election.

In many ways the Runcorn & Helsby parliamentary by-election was the least disruptive event. It may be early in Labour's term of office but we are used to governments being punished in by-elections and to voters casting a protest vote in favour of the party best placed to make a challenge. The narrowness of Reform's victory over Labour (six votes) rewrote the record books, but the 17.4 percentage point swing was below that achieved by either Labour or the Liberal Democrats in seven of the past ten by-elections before the 2024 general election.

The new MP, Sarah Pochin, will join her four colleagues in the House of Commons where business will continue largely unruffled.

The mayoral and council elections, though, changed the face of local government.

Before Thursday, the Tories controlled 16 of the 23 councils that went to the polls and were the largest party in five others. They lost two thirds of the seats they were defending and now have a majority in none of them. In only two — Buckinghamshire and Northumberland — do they even remain ahead of the pack.

Labour, already starting from a low base, also lost two thirds of their councillors and control of their only council with elections, Doncaster.

Reform, by contrast, took nearly 700 of the 1,640 seats being contested, won the popular vote in 15 of the 23 authorities and emerged with an overall majority on ten councils and as the largest party in four more.

Added to the two mayoral contests it won on either side of the Humber estuary, Reform mayors and councillors will now be directly responsible for the allocation and oversight of billions of pounds. And with that will come additional public scrutiny. The party will be in the governing rather than campaigning spotlight.

The Lib Dems, too, had a good night, somewhat obscured by the more dramatic success of Reform. They topped the poll in seven authorities, nearly doubled their seat numbers, won three councils, and are the lead party in four others.

This is reflected in our examination of more than 4.3 million local election votes cast across 1,400 divisions, contrasted with the patterns apparent at both the 2021 local elections and the 2024 general election.

We have then extrapolated from them in order to calculate a “national equivalent vote” of how the parties would have fared had these elections taken place in every part of the country.

There can be no doubt that Reform comes out on top. Our analysis puts them on 32 per cent, the best ever performance by a “third” party and ten points above the 22 per cent Ukip achieved at the local elections back in 2013. Indeed, our estimate for Reform even surpasses the 30.5 per cent of actual votes Nigel Farage’s then party, Brexit, polled at the 2019 European parliament contests.

That score also helps to explain Reform’s winning so many seats. Unlike Ukip in 2013 and Reform itself last year, it reached the tipping point whereby our first-past-the-post electoral system can deliver a bonus in seats for the party coming first overall in votes.

At the other end of the scale Labour and the Tories posted their lowest share of the vote, individually and collectively, in the 40 years we have been conducting this analysis for The Sunday Times.

The Tories are on 18 per cent — far below their previous low on this measure of 25 per cent under John Major back in 1995.

Labour is on 19 per cent compared with 34 per cent last year and its previous rock bottom score of 22 per cent in 2009. An outcome, incidentally, that prompted speculation about an internal coup against Gordon Brown, then prime minister.

The Lib Dems, on 16 per cent, show little change in their level of support but, as at the general election, were the beneficiaries of both careful targeting and the collapse

of the Tories in places — largely in southern England — where they were already in second place.

But there were flickers of consolation for Labour and the Tories amid the carnage. For the Tories it came with the former MP Paul Bristow’s victory in the Cambridgeshire & Peterborough mayoral contest. A reflection of our now fragmented electoral politics can be seen, though, in the fact that he topped the poll in only two of the area’s six constituent districts, with the Lib Dems also out front in two and Labour and Reform in one each.

Labour just hung on to the mayoralty in Doncaster even as the party was swept aside by Reform at council level. Labour’s candidate Ros Jones, incumbent since 2013, obviously had a strong personal following and was fairly scathing in her assessment of the national party after her victory.

Labour also retained the West of England mayoralty but there, too, there is an example of the impact of our now multi-party system. Helen Godwin won with only 25 per cent of the total vote on a turnout of 30 per cent. In other words, her mandate rests on the positive endorsement of fewer than one in thirteen eligible electors.

Overall, the average majority of the winning party in these elections was, at only 14 per cent, the lowest we have ever recorded. The average vote share for winning candidates, 41 per cent, is also a record low figure. Such statistics are a direct reflection of the number of competing parties and highlight how seismic change could come with a relatively small shift in voter sentiment.

There can be no doubt that Reform exceeded all prior expectations last week but the foundations of its success are fragile and shallow and a volatile electorate can withdraw its support as readily as it was offered in the first place.

**Colin Rallings and Michael Thrasher, Associate Members, Nuffield College, Oxford and Honorary Professors, University of Exeter**

## The man Britain cannot ignore

Nigel Farage’s return means a new, more volatile era in British politics

[Leaders](#) - *The Economist*, Apr 24th 2025

**Editor’s note (May 2nd 2025):** *The results of elections on May 1st confirmed Reform UK’s high opinion-poll standing.*

JUST A YEAR ago Britain seemed to be emerging from nearly a decade of post-Brexit madness. A refreshingly

## AUDIO VERSION ON CAHIER DE PREPA

dull election was being fought between Rishi Sunak and Sir Keir Starmer, a pair of sober-suited, workaholic technocrats with conventional economic ideas. After Sir Keir swept to victory, ministers boasted that investors would flock to an island of stability in a sea of turmoil.

Today populism is back in Britain with a vengeance. In council elections in England on May 1st Reform UK, the party led by the architect of Brexit, Nigel Farage, is poised to inflict heavy losses on the Conservatives. Mr Farage is once again upending politics, with grave implications for Britain and its role in Europe. That is because his second act threatens to be more audacious than his first: the pursuit not of Brexit, but of power.

The idea that national office is within Mr Farage's grasp probably sounds fantastical. Britain has a Labour government with a supersize majority; Mr Farage took eight attempts to enter Parliament and he now leads a faction of just four MPs, having fallen out with the fifth. Many of his views are unpopular, notably his excuse-making for Vladimir Putin. But Mr Farage is harder and more determined than he was a decade ago, and his new party is more professional.

What makes Reform a contender is a quirk in Britain's first-past-the-post electoral system. In the modern political era it has behaved like a pendulum, granting one or other of two big parties a large and predictable majority, even if they win only a third of the vote. But Reform has been polling at 20-26% since December, up from 14% in last year's election. Lately, it has been slightly ahead of the Conservatives and Labour. With three parties in this range, tiny shifts in voting can produce dramatically different results. Today's polling could give Reform over 230 seats; just a 2% increase might take its total close to 300, only 30 or so seats short of an absolute majority.

The next election is still as much as four years away. But when it comes, this slot machine could give Mr Farage a jackpot. If he thinks a majority is unlikely, he could strike a pre-election pact with the Tories to carve up the electoral map, and share power with them in government. Or he could refuse a pact and, in a hung parliament, install the Tories in a government that depended on his support for its survival. Whatever his title, he would call the shots.

All these outcomes would be bad for Britain. Mr Farage is not as toxic as Alternative for Germany and the National Rally in France. Like Giorgia Meloni in Italy, he has long kept apart from the extreme right, turning down Elon Musk's money rather than back Tommy Robinson, a street agitator. Nor is he wrong that immigration has been poorly managed in Britain, that it is unpopular and that economic growth has been paltry.

The trouble with Mr Farage is that his ideas would, once again, make Britain poorer and more dysfunctional. Some Tory defectors see a true Thatcherite in the former metals trader, but they are deluding themselves. Mr Farage promises a "net-zero" immigration policy, which would cripple all those public services that depend on migrants to fill vacancies. True, he is an enthusiastic tax-cutter, proposing to raise the income-tax threshold to £20,000 (\$26,800) a year, from £12,570 today, and to abolish

inheritance taxes. But he has no credible plan to pay for all this—an elephant trap that swallowed up the premiership of Liz Truss. Indeed, he wants to spend extra money, promising to restore fuel subsidies to pensioners and to nationalise the water and steel industries. And even as he courts business by vowing to scrap targets for reducing emissions, he says the "big corporate world" is hurting ordinary folk.

For an open economy partly financed by capital from abroad, this is self-defeating talk. Europe needs a common purpose to deal with the economic threat from American tariffs and the security threat from Russian revanchism. Mr Farage's loathing of Brussels would add to Britain's problems.

If Mr Farage were actually in government, bad ideas would be compounded by chaos. His career on the fringes has taught him to avoid delegating power to his colleagues. His record is littered with feuds. He detests the British establishment which he thinks has belittled him, from the Bank of England to the civil service. He thinks of policies as electoral tools for driving a wedge between his rivals and their voters. In a country where the state has become complex and hard to run, that is a recipe for paralysis.

You might think that the Conservatives would take advantage of this turn of events to dominate the centre ground, where elections are won. It is not so simple. Brexit radicalised the party. Many Tories today share Mr Farage's populist instincts. They fear that their party will haemorrhage support unless it steals Reform's clothes. They worry, with some reason, that moving towards the mainstream will shed more votes to the right than will be won back from the centre.

Labour is in a stronger position. For as long as the vote on the right is split, it may find that power comes its way more easily. But voters will eventually tire of Sir Keir and his uninspiring record, possibly as soon as the next election. And that will be Mr Farage's moment.

### **A double Farage**

The Labour victory contained the promise of a virtuous circle. Political stability would create the space for difficult reforms and encourage investment. Higher economic growth would mean better public services and happier voters. The volatility that rocked Britain for a decade would be calmed.

If Sir Keir wastes that opportunity, a different future could open up. Britain could become locked in a doom-loop of low growth, an angry electorate, and governments that run from unpopular reforms or pursue investment-killing ideas. With Brexit, Mr Farage helped embed the poor growth and state dysfunction that are even now providing fuel for his return. Britain has already spent one decade struggling to get by in the world Mr Farage created. It can ill afford a second.



