

Document 1 - The Guardian view on Great British Railways: renationalisation can put passengers back in the driving seatEditorial

A new 'guiding mind' for the industry will end the fragmentation that came with privatisation. But the public will want to see cheaper tickets too

The Guardian, Tue 3 Jun 2025

Government guidance documents rarely feature soaring prose to fire the imagination. But a recent Department for Transport policy update contained one passage to lift the spirits of train users up and down the country. Setting out the future of Great British Railways (GBR), the public body that will oversee a renationalised and reintegrated rail network, its authors observe that "instead of having to navigate 14 separate train operators, passengers will once again simply be able to use 'the railway'".

Last month, this journey back to the future began as the first renationalised South Western Railway (SWR) service departed Woking for London Waterloo, complete with union jack branding and the logo "Great British Railways: coming soon". The remaining nine private franchises will be back in public ownership by 2027, by which time a new GBR headquarters will be up and running in Derby. The transport secretary, Heidi Alexander, hailed the moment as a new dawn. There can be little doubt that a reset is badly needed. Fragmentation, in the name of competition, was the original sin of the destructive and ideological privatisation of the rail network in the 1990s. The wrongheaded decision to separate the management of track and trains led to confused accountability and buck-passing between train operators and Network Rail.

Accompanying marketisation, and the restless search for profit, inaugurated an era in which a baffling profusion of ticket types did little to mitigate the cost of travelling on the most expensive trains in Europe. Poor performance by franchises such as Avanti West Coast and TransPennine Express (taken back into public ownership in 2023) undermined public confidence in an industry crucial to Britain's green transition. A period of disastrous industrial relations, and reduced passenger numbers since the pandemic, have compounded a sense of crisis.

It would be foolish to hope for an instant turnaround. The future shape and finances of rail travel are still unclear, following the post-Covid collapse in lucrative commuter and business travel. But having been constituted explicitly as a publicly run "guiding mind" for the whole network, carrying responsibility for both track and trains, GBR will have the power to rationalise its operations and place the interests of passengers first. A simpler, more joined-up ticketing system should be a priority.

Somewhat bathetically, the optics of last month's SWR launch were compromised by Sunday engineering works and the need for a rail replacement bus from Surbiton to London Waterloo. Some things never change. But though free-market dogmatists will have relished that hitch to proceedings, a large majority of the population strongly welcome the prospective return of a vital public good to public hands. Much of their support, however, is undoubtedly linked to a hope that GBR will do something to address the often prohibitive cost of travelling by rail in Britain. On the subject of cheaper tickets, Ms Alexander has been noticeably reticent, pointing to current subsidies of £2bn a year. Labour should think bigger. After a disruptive and demoralising period, imagination is needed today for an industry that delivers crucial economic, environmental and societal benefits.

Document 3 - UK Supreme Court rules legal definition of a woman is based on biological sex

BBC, 16 April 2025

Summary

- The UK Supreme Court rules that the legal definition of a woman is based on biological sex
- Judges say the "concept of sex is binary" while cautioning that the landmark ruling should not be seen as victory of one side over another
- Transgender people still have legal protection from discrimination, the court adds - read the full 88-page judgement
- The Scottish government had argued that transgender people with a gender recognition certificate (GRC) are entitled to sex-based protections, while For Women Scotland argued they only apply to people that are born female

- For Women Scotland says it's grateful for the decision after a "long road" of legal battles, while charity Scottish Trans urges people "not to panic"
- The Scottish government says it acted "in good faith" and will work with Westminster to understand the full implications of the ruling

Document 2 - Women win legal clarity—but Britain's gender wars intensify

The Supreme Court's ruling on sex was the easy part. Implementing it will be harder

People from the transgender community hold a protest against the Supreme Court ruling on the definition of a woman
The Economist, May 1st 2025

IT WAS A landmark decision. On April 16th Britain's Supreme Court ruled that, for the purposes of the Equality Act of 2010, the country's main anti-discrimination law, "man" refers to a biological man and "woman" to a biological woman. The judgment ended years of legal uncertainty about such matters. Since sex is a protected characteristic under the act, it means a space or service that excludes men, such as a women's bathroom, can also exclude all transgender women (biological males). The next day, the British Transport Police announced it would now conduct strip searches on the basis of biological sex, rather than how a person identifies.

Transgender people were devastated; "gender-critical" feminists, who saw their views reflected in the judgment, rejoiced. Sir Keir Starmer, the prime minister, thanked the court for providing much-needed clarity. Yet two weeks on, the hope that this would swiftly resolve one of Britain's most polarising issues has faded. Victory in one legal battle, even a landmark one, is not the end of the gender wars.

The judgment itself was definitive. Although Britain's highest court was not the first in the world to rule on this question, it has been the clearest. Until now, the predominant interpretation of the Equality Act was that "woman" could mean either a biological woman or a trans woman with a gender-recognition certificate (GRC), a document held by around 8,500 people in Britain, which allows them to legally change their sex on their birth certificate. The act protects against sex discrimination in the workplace, schools and services open to the public, such as hospitals, shops or restaurants. It also covers justified exemptions—for example, in single-sex bathrooms, competitive sport, and associations and charities. The five judges unanimously found that interpreting "sex" as including "certificated sex" made the act incoherent, particularly in areas like pregnancy provisions and lesbian rights.

Critics claim the ruling was flawed. The judges failed to define "biological sex", they argued, and no trans voices were heard during the case. Yet the court noted that the term "biological sex" is used widely to describe the sex of a person at birth. And no trans groups applied to speak at the hearing. Even the Scottish government, whose ministers had contested the case, accepted the judgment without protest.

Now comes the harder part. The ruling needs to be implemented in organisations such as the National Health Service, which has for years based ward placement on gender presentation—dress, names and pronouns. It is already facing internal resistance. On April 26th a wing of the British Medical Association, the doctors' union, condemned the Supreme Court's verdict as "scientifically illiterate", arguing that sex and gender are complex. Several other unions and charities have spoken out against it, too. Refuge, a domestic-abuse charity supporting both biological and trans women, said it would continue to welcome trans women to its shelters.

The fight goes on

The Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC), the regulator which enforces the Equality Act, has floated the idea of separate "third spaces" for trans people. In a (non-binding) update, it suggested that in some circumstances, trans people could also be excluded from the facilities of their biological sex. Clarification on these and other thorny practical questions will come when the EHRC issues binding guidance this summer. Gender-critical campaigners insist the law is settled. "Ignorance of the law is no excuse," says Naomi Cunningham, an employment barrister and the chair of Sex Matters, a gender-critical charity. But those mandated to provide sufficient single-sex toilets and changing rooms, such as employers, gyms and pools, will probably wait with any retrofitting until official guidance arrives.

The judges were at pains to stress that trans people still have protections: "gender reassignment", like "sex", is a protected characteristic. Other rights conferred by a GRC—such as marrying according to one's acquired gender, or being recorded as such on a death certificate—are unchanged. For many trans people this is cold comfort. They feel that in balancing rights the court struck a blow to a vulnerable minority. "I regard this as an act of cruelty," says Robin White, a barrister who is transgender.

To some Britain looks as if it is rolling back trans rights, even as countries including Ireland, Malta and Spain increasingly allow rights based on gender self-identification. Plenty of people also worry that the ruling could lead to a rise in discrimination. To many, however, the court's decision reflects a desire to protect women's rights rather than a dislike of trans people. While half of Britons think people should be able to transition socially, only 34% think they should be allowed to change their legal gender, according to YouGov, a pollster. Asked about the recent ruling, some 59% of Britons agreed with the court and 18% disagreed, found Electoral Calculus, another pollster.

Among activists the ideological trenches seem only to be deepening. Both sides are gearing up for further court battles. Gender-critical feminists have vowed to push for rapidly implementing the ruling in prisons, hospital wards and lavatories. Trans activists will try to get their cases to the European Court of Human Rights. "This is gender apartheid," says Jane Fae of TransActual, a trans-advocacy group. "There will be no giving way."■

Document 4 - E.U. and U.K. Strike a Deal: What to Know

Top officials from Britain and the European Union gathered in London on Monday to announce a "reset" of post-Brexit relations.



Ursula von der Leyen, president of the European Commission, and Prime Minister Keir Starmer of Britain in Tirana, Albania, on Friday. Credit...Leon Neal/Getty Images

By Jeanna Smialek Reporting from Brussels, *The New York Times*, May 19, 2025

Top officials from the European Union and Britain announced a deal in London on Monday that will tighten their trade and defense relationships, as the two allies pivot toward a post-Brexit future.

The summit had been billed as a major reset of relations, and it was closely watched given the context: Both Europe and Britain are trying to figure out how to reorient themselves in a world where America is a less reliable ally.

Here's what to know.

What was announced on defense and security?

Officials announced a new defense agreement, the biggest outcome of the summit. Diplomats have been negotiating for weeks on the plans, which are expected to set the tone for relations at a critical moment, as Russia's war in Ukraine grinds on and as the United States urges European nations to shoulder a greater responsibility for their own security.

"The E.U. and U.K. are providers of global stability," Antonio Costa, the president of the European Council and one of the officials attending the summit, said on

Monday. "We must be guardians of the rules based global order."

The defense deal lays the groundwork for Britain to eventually become a bigger part of European defense efforts, including a 150 billion euro loan program for joint procurement and investment. That plan is largely limited to E.U. nations and select allies, and Britain has been eager to take part.

The deal "will pave the way for the U.K. defense industry to participate," the British government said.

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With the defense partnership, the two sides agreed to biannual meetings between Kaja Kallas — the E.U.'s top diplomat — and the British foreign and defense secretaries, as well as more cooperation on crisis management exercises and improved information sharing, including of classified information.

What was agreed on trade and immigration?

The partners agreed to plan on relaxing some post-Brexit trade barriers to make it easier for animals and food to move between the two economies without

onerous sanitation certifications and checks. And, as the British emphasized, it will now be possible for the nation's producers to again sell raw meat products into the bloc, including burgers and sausages.

In return, Britain will have to make sure that it permanently aligns with European Union food safety and animal welfare rules.

And the two sides also agreed to work more closely together on detecting and deterring illegal migration.

What have been the sticking points?

Reaching an agreement was far from seamless. Europeans — and particularly coastal countries like France and Belgium — insisted that Britain extend access to U.K. fishing waters for more than a few years. Fishing is a politically sensitive topic, and the British side was hesitant to make that move.

After discussions that went to the last minute, the two sides agreed that they would allow European boats to access British fishing waters until June 30, 2038. That's not the indefinite extension that some in Europe wanted, but it is a far longer window than the four years that the British had initially suggested.

"This agreement brings stability and predictability for fishermen and fisherwomen on both sides of the channel," said Ursula von der Leyen, president of the European Commission and one of the attendees in London on Monday.

Likewise, tensions had emerged over a youth mobility program, which is meant to give young people from both sides access to each other's countries. Europe was pushing for lower tuition for E.U. students who study at U.K. universities. Their British counterparts argued that granting that access would be too expensive.

In the end, the two sides agreed to "work toward" a plan — rebranded the "youth experience" scheme, rather than the "youth mobility" scheme, to avoid any hint of immigration.

See also <https://www.britishchambers.org.uk/policy-campaigns/global-britain/our-solutions/uk-eu-summit-2025/>

"The exact conditions related to this scheme will be decided during the negotiations," according to a European Union fact sheet.

In fact, much of the final deal is broad-brush — a plan to collaborate in the future, but one with details that remain to be determined.

What are the politics?

For the European Union, striking new trade and security agreements is an important way to prove to the United States that it is an economic and diplomatic power to be reckoned with.

President Trump has hit Europe with several waves of tariffs and is only beginning to make deals to de-escalate the situation. While Britain has struck a preliminary deal with the U.S., the European Union has made limited progress toward one.

And both partners see a need for greater collaboration in a world where the United States is a less-willing supporter of its traditional allies. Britain's defense industry could benefit from being included in Europe's push to rearm, and Europe could benefit from Britain's military capabilities.

But the partners also face domestic pressure to defend their own interests — and Keir Starmer, Britain's prime minister, faced particularly stark criticism as the deal became public.

The insurgent Reform U.K. party, led by Nigel Farage, a Trump ally and famous Brexit backer, has attacked the proposed youth experience plan.

On Monday, headlines in some British publications made it clear that Mr. Starmer would also face backlash over other aspects of the deal. "This humiliation is only the beginning," read one on the front page of *The Telegraph*. "Starmer rejects claim 'win-win' UK-EU deal has sold out fishing sector," read another in *The Guardian*.

Document 5 - This humiliating surrender is only the beginning

European Union secures 12-year access to British waters as Starmer crumbles – just like Brussels always thought he would

James Crisp, Europe Editor, *The Telegraph*, May 19 2025

Brussels has landed a whopper of a "Brexit reset deal" on fish, securing 12 years access to British waters.

It's a significant victory for the European Union, a humiliating surrender from Sir Keir Starmer, and yet another example of Brexit-voting British fishermen being thrown under the bus.

Britain originally pushed for a one-year deal, setting up annual negotiations on fishing rights to replace the five-

year pact struck in the Brexit trade negotiations, which expires next year.

That was the plan when the UK conceded to EU pressure in the final hours of those painful, high-stakes talks that brought a deal signed on Dec 30 2020.

But once Brussels has a concession, it never willingly surrenders it. Instead, it uses it as a foothold to push for more. It demanded five years, which, after some haggling, brought Britain to make a compromise offer of three years.

By Sunday, 24 hours before Monday's UK-EU summit, Britain had moved to four years.

Recommended

European Commission negotiators, under pressure from EU capitals, especially Paris, were turning the screws.

If Britain wanted to limit fish to four years, then the Swiss-style veterinary deal to boost trade would be limited to four years as well.

Tying the two deals together would make it much harder to claw back more fish for British boats in the future.

It's an established commission tactic; the first Brexit fishing deal expires at the same time as an agreement on continued UK access to the EU electricity market.

The British wanted the veterinary deal to be kept permanent. Otherwise, its decision to sacrifice Brexit freedoms and align with EU plant and animal health rules would look very weak. It would undermine the Government's claims that it would bring economic growth and lower grocery prices if the deal was temporary.

Weak negotiating position

Experts believe that the deal will bring a 0.1 per cent boost to GDP, which seems a moderate return for such a concession. But the deal will make it easier to export British fish to the EU, which is the major market for the UK, which exports most of what it catches.

With the summit hours away, and Sir Keir hoping for a third deal with a major partner in recent weeks, the UK was in a weak negotiating position.

This was the moment the EU was waiting for as the talks entered the endgame. The clock was ticking, as Michel Barnier used to say.

The EU could easily walk away with no deal, but that was not an option for a Prime Minister bleeding support to Reform UK.

If Britain wanted no deadline on the veterinary deal, it would have to pay big for it in fish, three times as much as it had offered.

In the wee small hours of the morning, Britain surrendered and agreed it would last 12 years.

Late ambush pays off

At this stage, it is unclear whether this will mean fish catches on the same terms as the expiring deal, which would be an EU victory, or potentially allow even more.

What is clear is that Sir Keir has surrendered one of the few points of leverage the UK had in its dealings with the EU, where fish is politically very important, until 2038.

The reset has also secured a defence pact with the EU and paved the way for UK involvement in EU rearmament programmes after Emmanuel Macron's France insisted it was conditional on a deal on fish.

Recommended

The EU's last minute ambush in the dying hours of the reset negotiations has paid off in spades.

Brussels was always confident it would. There is precedent. The same thing happened during the last hours of the Brexit trade negotiations.

Britain under Boris Johnson also caved in on fish to get a trade deal that prevented an economically devastating no deal and a return to World Trade Organisation terms. Mr Johnson at least had the excuse that he got a trade deal in return, rather than a reset agreement that merely tinkers around the edge of one already weighted in the EU's favour.

Uphill battle

The negotiations with the EU were always going to be an uphill battle. Brussels knows that Britain needs the deal more than it does and that size matters.

Its tough negotiation stance, which has secured a promise for more talks on youth mobility, is based on the belief that the heft of its single market, with 460 million consumers, will always tell in the end.

That conviction was strengthened in these new talks because the UK does not have the shelter of a trading bloc at a time when Donald Trump is threatening to trigger a global trade war.

The threat of Russia has also weakened Britain's hand, although it made the defence pact easier to do and accelerated the reset.

Britain has given away an awful lot for some modest gains.

Brussels is ruthless about negotiating in the EU's own interest, and its own interest alone.

Sir Keir, a Remainer who once pushed for a second referendum, might have hoped he'd be given an easier ride by the European Commission than the Tories.

In the end it was a case of plus ça change – the more things change, the more things stay the same.

Document 6 - Labour's immigration plans at a glance

BBC News, 12 May 2025

Sir Keir Starmer has unveiled Labour's long-awaited plans to cut levels of immigration into the UK. The prime minister said measures in the white paper, a

blueprint for future laws, would make the system "controlled, selective and fair".

Here is a summary of the key measures.

Work visas tightened - for some

Overseas workers will now generally need a degree-level qualification to apply for the main skilled worker visa, instead of the equivalent of A-level, reversing a change made under Boris Johnson's government.

This higher threshold will not apply to those already in the UK renewing their visa - but ministers say it will prevent new visa applications for around 180 jobs, reducing immigration by around 39,000 a year by 2029. Lower qualification requirements will remain on a "time limited basis" for sectors deemed to be facing long-term recruitment issues.

What this means in practice is not yet clear, with the government's migration advisory body tasked with recommending roles for inclusion.

Lower-qualification visas will be capped and restricted to employers with a workforce training plan in place, whilst those applying will also face extra restrictions on bringing their dependants to the UK.

But loosened for others

At the same time, the government wants to expand eligibility for its dedicated work visa for graduates of elite universities outside the UK.

The visa for international students who plan to set up a business in the UK will also be reviewed, and ministers say they want to make it easier for "top scientific and design talent" to apply for the global talent visa.

Longer residency waits

Immigrants will typically have to live in the UK for 10 years before applying for the right to stay indefinitely – double the current five-year period.

Under the plans, this period could be reduced through a new "earned settlement" system, under which people would be awarded points to reflect their contribution to the UK "economy and society".

It is not yet clear when this longer qualifying period will kick in - details of the new system, along with a similar scheme that will apply to applications for citizenship, will be consulted on later this year.

Care visa scrapped

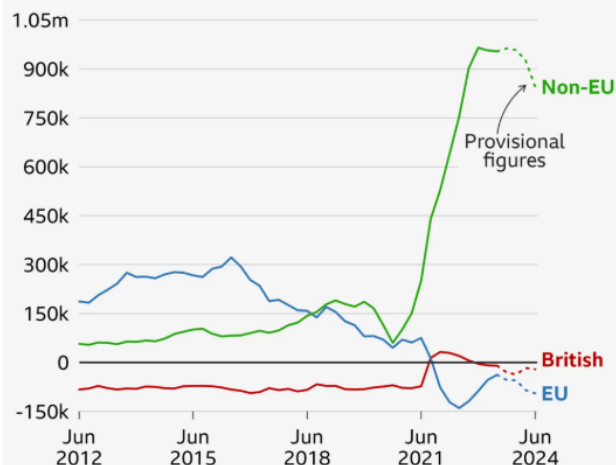
A dedicated visa for social care workers introduced during the Covid pandemic will close to new applicants next month.

Ministers say the visa, which was tightened last year, was a key driver of increased immigration in the years after Brexit, and better pay in the sector can solve longstanding recruitment problems.

Visa extensions will be permitted until 2028, and those who already have working rights will be able to switch sponsor during the term of their visa.

Net migration to the UK

12 month UK arrivals minus departures



Note: EU includes all current EU countries plus Norway, Iceland, Liechtenstein and Switzerland

Source: ONS

BBC

Stricter student rules

Overseas graduates will only be able to stay in the UK for 18 months after their studies, instead of two years currently.

Ministers are also thinking of charging English universities a new 6% tax on tuition fee income from international students, which they are promising to reinvest into the higher education and skills system.

The government says it expects this to be passed on to international students in the form of higher fees, reducing applications by 7,000 per year.

Refugee pilot extended

A "limited pool" of people who lack refugee status in the UK but have been recognised as refugees by the United Nations will be allowed to use existing sponsored worker routes to come to the UK to work.

Ministers say this will build on a three-year EU-sponsored pilot project that saw around 100 skilled refugees and their families allowed to work in specified sectors such as IT, construction and engineering.

Tougher English tests

Language requirements for all work visas will increase, whilst adult dependents of visa-holders will be required to demonstrate a basic understanding of English to come on a spousal and partner route.

The government says those extending visas will be required to demonstrate a higher level of English when applying to settle in the UK.

Skills and training

The government says firms in sectors deemed to rely too much on overseas workers will be "expected to comply" with strategies to boost workplace skills. These will also be determined by official migration advisers, but government sources say IT, construction and healthcare are likely to feature.

Family rights reviewed

The government says it will table legislation to "clarify" how the right to a family life in European human rights law should apply to immigration cases.

It also says Parliament will be able to adopt a "framework" aiming to limit the extent to which family rights can be used to delay the removal of people without the right to stay in the UK.

No overall cap

The prime minister said the government wants to "significantly" reduce net migration - the number of

people coming to the UK minus those leaving - from the record levels it has reached in recent years.

But the prime minister is not putting a number on the overall level of net migration he wants to see – saying this approach has consistently failed in the past.

Opposition parties have also declined to specify exactly what levels of migration they want to see each year.

The Conservatives now say they would allow MPs to decide annual caps each year through a vote in Parliament.

PM Keir Starmer's speech in full: <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/pm-remarks-at-immigration-white-paper-press-conference-12-may-2025>

Document 7 - Keir Starmer's immigration plans: research shows you don't beat the far right by becoming them

The Conversation May 12, 2025

Katy Brown, Research Fellow in Language and Social Justice, Manchester Metropolitan University

As British prime minister Keir Starmer vowed to “finally take back control of our borders” in a landmark speech on immigration on May 12, it felt a little like déjà vu.

Some nine years earlier, we had heard those exact words repeated over and over in the build-up to the Brexit referendum from former prime minister Boris Johnson and the Leave campaign. It was a refrain also used by Nigel Farage and UKIP.

Of course, this direct reference was the point. Starmer used it to claim that the Labour government's white paper on immigration was finally going to deliver on what had been promised and desired for many years.

In these opening lines, the tone was set. And as the speech went on, there were echoes of far-right language and ideas reverberating throughout. Starmer lamented the “squalid” state of contemporary politics, the “forces” pulling the country apart, and the previous government's so-called “experiment in open borders”.

This speech and the white paper that it unveiled are but the latest indication of the rightward direction of travel within UK politics, led by mainstream and far-right parties alike – as exemplified in recent months by the footage released of immigration raids and deportations.

Some will argue this is Labour's response to the rising threat of Reform UK, with results in the recent local elections seen as evidence of the far right's growing popularity. So the story goes, Labour is proving that they can be tough on immigration, showing would-be Reform defectors that they can be trusted after all.

This familiar narrative seems to follow a prevailing wisdom which is parroted in political, media and public debates – that appeasing the far right is the way to defeat it. Rather than beating the far right at their own game, however, research shows that these techniques simply legitimise their key talking points and further normalise exclusionary politics.

Starmer's speech is a case in point. In using “take back control” from the outset, there was no hiding the intended audience or message. Starmer claimed that this project would “close the book on a squalid chapter for our politics, our economy, and our country”, implying that excessive immigration has directly caused these problems and that stopping it solves them. This chimes with classic far-right narratives where migration is framed as the root of all societal ills.

When these kinds of ideas are pushed by those in government, with great authority and influence, they are given greater credence and weight. A strikingly clear example of this came in the summer of 2024 when participants in racist riots waved posters containing the slogan “stop the boats” (a phrase popularised by the previous Tory government).

Another component of the speech that was reminiscent of far-right tropes was the idea that increased immigration was a deliberate tactic by the previous government. Starmer suggested that the Conservatives were actively pursuing a “one-nation experiment in open borders” while deceiving the British public of their intentions.

Far-right conspiracies are often premised on the idea that elites are deliberately encouraging mass immigration. It's not hard to see how Starmer's words could act as a dog whistle in this scenario.

These claims are especially damaging when we think about the draconian measures introduced under former Conservative governments, such as the Rwanda policy. Labour is now indicating that these proposals didn't go far enough.

To justify bringing far stricter immigration rules, Starmer stated that "for the vast majority of people in this country, that is what they have long wanted to see". As far-right parties so often do, Labour suggests that they are delivering on "people's priorities". Yet are they really a priority for people, or are we told that they are a priority which then makes them more of a priority?

Research by Aurelien Mondon, senior lecturer in politics at the University of Bath, illustrates how people's personal and national priorities differ dramatically. When people in the UK were asked to name the two most important issues facing them personally, immigration didn't even make it into the top ten.

However, when asked the same question about the issues facing their country, immigration topped the list. How can something that doesn't affect you in your day-to-day life suddenly become a top priority for your country? We need to challenge the narrative that the government is simply acting on people's wishes and acknowledge its own capacity to set the agenda.

Other priorities

Some will say that harsher anti-immigration policies are a necessary evil to defeat the far right. However, if people's personal priorities are really the cost of living, housing and education, why is the government not focusing more of its energy on these things rather than scapegoating migrants?

What's more, research shows that even based on these terms, these strategies are ineffective and can actually boost the success of the far right electorally. After all, its ideas are being repeatedly normalised.

In all this tactical talk, we lose sight of the fact that people are living the consequences of this rhetoric and policies right now. Rather than focus on Reform's potential performance in a general election that is probably years away, we should recognise the immediate consequences of the rhetoric that has accompanied this white paper. Even if this did put a dent in Reform's prospects, what is the meaning of defeating them if the policies they promote become part of the mainstream in the process?

The bottom line is that you do not beat the far right by becoming them. It doesn't work electorally or ideologically, and even if it did, minoritised communities suffer the consequences regardless. The far right is not some threat lying waiting in the future – its normalisation is happening now.

Document 8 - How Nigel Farage's Reform UK party upended British politics

The Labour and Conservative parties are reeling from Nigel Farage's election success.

The Washington Post, May 4, 2025

James Heale is the deputy political editor of the Spectator magazine in London.

"Guess who's back, back again?" After Britain left the European Union in 2020, much of Westminster hoped that they had seen the last of Nigel Farage. But the veteran Brexiteer is dominating British politics once again, having been elected to Parliament in July using the music of Eminem as his campaign song. Last week, Farage's insurgent party, Reform UK, stormed to victory in the English council elections. With 30 percent of the projected national share, Reform trounced both Labour (20 percent) and the Conservatives (15 percent). For more than a century, power in Britain has changed hands intermittently between those two parties. But amid voter fury about decrepit public service, Farage threatens their stranglehold on British politics. On Thursday night, Reform showed it could win seats right across England, from Devon in the south to Durham in the north. Its highest vote share came in Tony Blair's

old constituency of Sedgefield, a former coal mining center.

Much of Farage's campaign was inspired by America. His main pledge was a "DOGE in every county" — a promise that auditors would root out and eradicate wasteful spending at a local level. His rallies, like those of Donald Trump, featured plenty of razzmatazz, including fireworks and Union Jacks galore. On Facebook, he played "pothole golf," knocking balls into holes on unfixed roads to underline their neglect; on TikTok, he helped plant flowers in them.

Instead of hyping these local elections into a battle for the fate of the nation, Reform campaign staff focused on bin collections, reasoning that voters were less interested in ideology than the delivery of basic services. It was only in the final week that the campaign shifted to national issues, in a push to get out the vote. Farage headed to Dover to decry the 37,000

migrants who arrived in Britain illegally via the English Channel last year and pledged to introduce a “minister for deportations.”

It was a strategy vindicated by results. Reform won 677 of 1,641 wards and became the largest party on 14 of 23 councils. It also gained a fifth member of Parliament in the House of Commons too, snatching a Labour seat in the Runcorn and Helsby by-election, winning by just six votes. For strategists, the results showed that a vote for a minor party is no longer a wasted vote. As one puts it, “If you vote Reform, you get Reform.” That will be the party’s message to voters in the Scottish and Welsh parliamentary elections next May.

The rise of Farage’s party poses major problems for Prime Minister Keir Starmer’s Labour government. “The message I take out of these elections,” he said on Friday, “is that we need to go further and we need to go faster on the change that people want to see.” But with Britain’s annual economic growth running at just 1 percent, there are increasing doubts within Labour about whether Starmer can deliver sufficient “change” by the next general election in 2029.

A bad night for Labour was even worse for the Conservatives. “A total bloodbath” is how leader Kemi Badenoch described the results, as the Tories lost 676 councillors and every single authority that they controlled. The party — which ruled Britain from 2010 to 2024 — now faces a total wipeout, with Reform, Labour and the Liberal Democrats on the left eroding every part of its aging electoral base. Much like the Gaullists in France, the traditional party of the British

center-right risks being consigned to the history books by a brash new upstart.

Reform UK now wants to accelerate this process. Already, the party has signaled that it will seek injunctions to stop the Home Office from housing asylum seekers in council areas it now controls. The aim is to draw a contrast between Reform-run councils and others, much like Republican governors in the U.S. who sent undocumented migrants to Democratic-controlled “sanctuary cities.”

Both Labour and the Conservative Party argue that, with Reform members elected to office, the party will soon find governing very different from campaigning. The bulk of local authority spending is dictated by statutory duties, such as adult social care. Far from wielding a chainsaw like Argentine President Javier Milei, they argue, Reform will yield merely token savings in its DOGE-style crusade. Big egos in small parties tend to clash, with civil war being a feature of Farage’s previous political forays.

Yet such jibes are usually said as much in hope as in expectation. The constraints imposed on Reform’s councils might serve instead as a justification for the party in its campaign for national government in 2029. Now that local bastions have been seized, next comes Wales and Scotland in 2026. And Downing Street looms on the horizon.

Farage’s approach to party management evokes the Ship of Theseus: Elements of his ship are constantly changed over time, but always the vessel sails on. Right now, Farage has a favorable wind at his back and a clear destination in mind.

See also The Selection on the Local Elections on Cahier de Prépa