

Dorling, D. (2024) Reflections on the results of the General Election, Transforming Society, Bristol University Press Blog, 12 July, <https://www.transformingsociety.co.uk/2024/07/12/reflections-on-the-results-of-the-general-election/>

Reflections on the results of the General Election

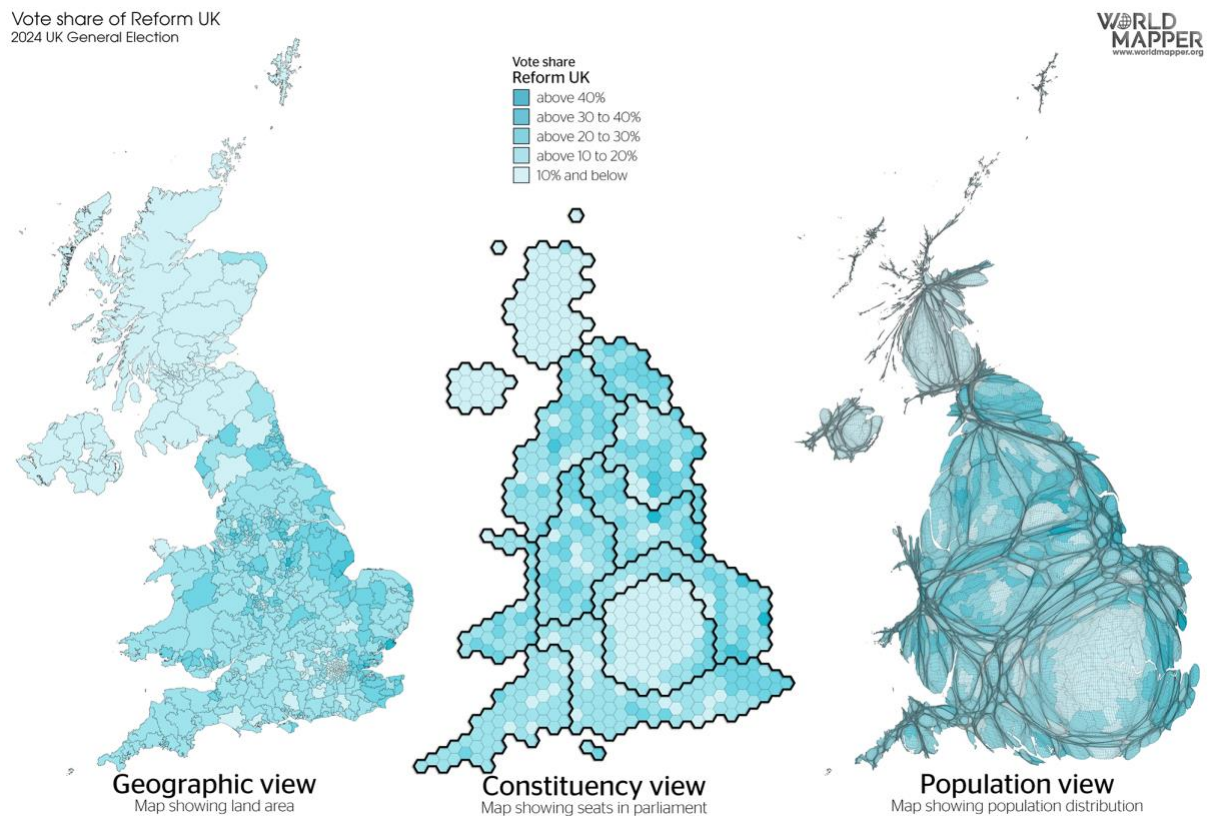
This article is part of a [blog series](#) published in partnership with Academics Stand Against Poverty UK, following their manifesto audit of the 2024 election. They have analysed the policies in the manifestos in relation to poverty to assess how confident they are that they will enable British society to flourish. Here, Danny Dorling offers his take on the results.

Thanks to the far-far-right standing in almost every seat in the UK 2024 General Election, Labour is now in power as the party of government. Although many people think this was a forgone conclusion, just a few months earlier there had been great uncertainty over the outcome.

That uncertainty may have been a key part of the reason why the manifesto that the Labour Party presented to the British people was so lacklustre. The Labour leadership did not want to frighten voters away.

Figure 1 shows the greatest shock of the 2024 General Election, that outside Scotland, Northern Ireland and London, the far-far-right Reform UK party won a significant proportion of votes almost everywhere. This was partly because turnout was very low, but also because so many former Conservative voters defected rightwards. The geographical pattern of where the far-far-right fared well was telling – away from city centres, and especially along the coasts where older and sometimes poorer people are most concentrated (right hand cartogram in Figure 1).

Figure 1: Votes for Reform UK in the 2024 General Election



Source: <https://worldmapper.org/uk-general-election-2024/>

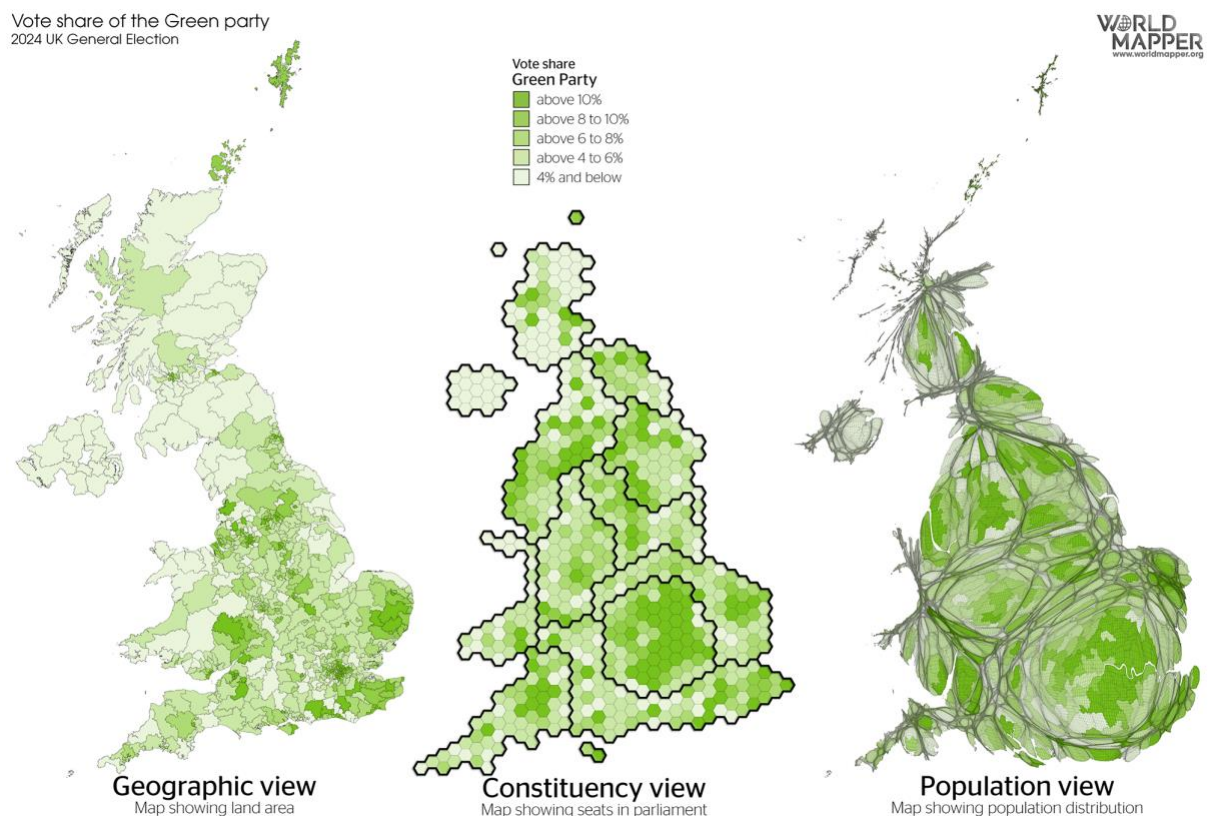
On 3 May 2024, [Sky News forecast](#) that there would be a hung parliament in Britain at the next General Election, with Labour winning only 294 seats given the popularity of the party at that time. Labour's popularity actually [fell](#) during May and June 2024, from 44 per cent of voters supporting the party at the start of May, to 40 per cent by 3 July. On the day of the election, the Labour Party secured only 33.7 per cent of the vote, lower still and a lower absolute number than in 2019; but nevertheless won some 411 seats, thus securing a huge majority.

British politics has shifted greatly since Labour last won a majority of this size, in 1997. The Labour Party moved far to the political right under Tony Blair and Gordon Brown. The Conservatives were forced even further right, leaving the European People's Party Group of Conservative political parties by 2014, to join a far-right grouping in the EU, and by 2022 becoming the most economically right-wing political grouping in the world, according to [one analysis](#) published by the *Financial Times*. Labour, in many ways having taken the political place of the Conservatives, experiences limited pressure from the political left; with only some Liberal Democrat policies, and a few more Green Party policies being to the left of Labour, at least in terms of [manifesto commitments](#).

The shift in far-right Conservative vote towards the UK's far-far-right party (Reform UK) has resulted in a further swing to the right within British politics. Despite this, the House of Commons now contains four Green MPs (the geography of the Green Party vote was the geographical antithesis of that of Reform UK; see Figure 2), four independent MPs elected for their position on the atrocities in Gaza, and the former leader of the Labour party, Jeremy Corbyn, who secured his seat for the 11th time. Reform UK only won five seats. There is no longer a single Conservative MP in Wales, the Scottish National Party lost many seats (but in a parliament in

which they wield no power), and in Northern Ireland, Sinn Fein became the largest party with seven seats (which they will not sit in). This grouping may provide some voice, albeit a small one, of pressure on Labour's left flank.

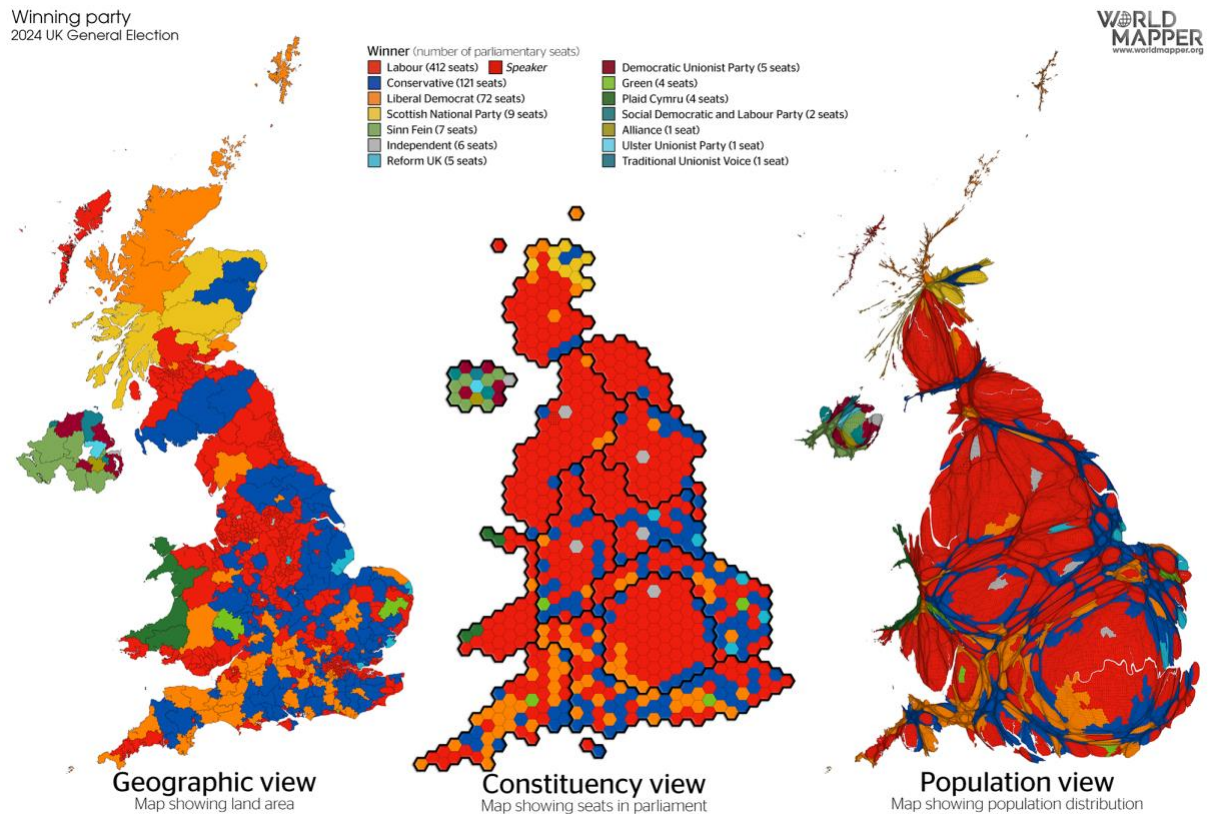
Figure 2: Votes for the Green Party in the 2024 General Election



Source: <https://worldmapper.org/uk-general-election-2024/>

Figure 3 shows how dominant Labour has become in terms of seats. Beneath the surface, however, Labour has lost half a million voters since 2019. It has increased its vote share by less than two percentage points, and only did that because more Conservative voters (who did not defect to Reform UK) chose to abstain compared to Labour voters. Labour lost several seats, including that of Jonathan Ashworth, a potential Minister, and now has a Health Secretary in an ultra-marginal constituency.

Figure 3: Which party won which seat in the 2024 General Election?



Source: <https://worldmapper.org/uk-general-election-2024/>

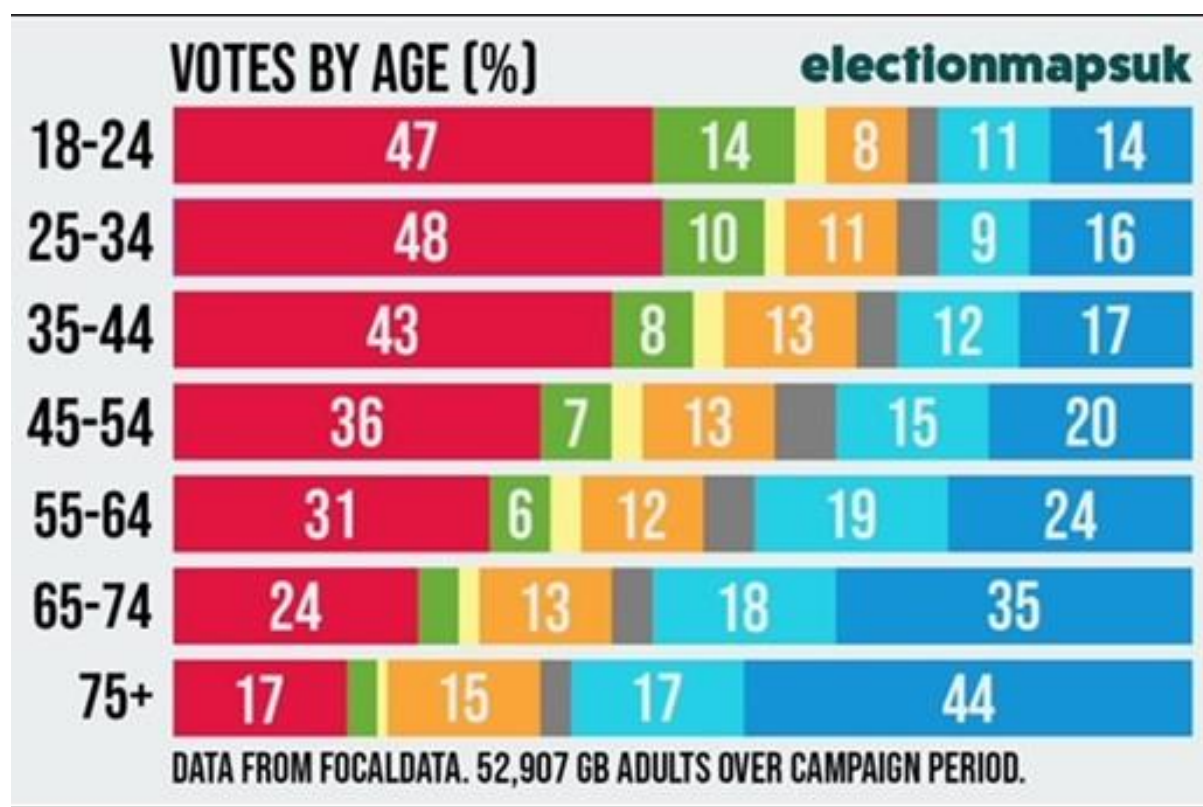
On the manifestos, [ASAP UK](#) analysis placed both the Greens and Liberal Democrats ahead of Labour in their policy ambitions to tackle poverty. The [Intergenerational Foundation](#) judged the Green Party manifesto to be the most friendly to the young. The [High Pay Centre](#) noted that ‘Labour commits to some degree of progressive taxation on private schools, energy giants and non-doms’, but that it was otherwise vague in its promises – other than saying that before any implementation of policy, ‘the Labour manifesto emphasises that [it] will consult fully with business and other stakeholders...’ And, given its majority, Labour’s is the only manifesto that now matters. There will be close attention given to what Labour now says and does in office, not least by the huge numbers of Labour MPs who are unlikely ever to become government ministers.

What is most unusual is that even in July 2024 we, the public, have very little idea what Labour will actually do. Most newly elected Labour MPs also do not know. At first, it appeared as if the new government were still in election mode and playing to the gallery, the one they imagined they were trying to impress:

The *Guardian* writer [Frances Ryan](#) commented in shock a few days after the election on watching one post-election broadcast: **'...it really is remarkable to hear a Labour health secretary describe calls for funding as "the begging bowl" – as opposed to, y'know, resources to pay for GP appointments, cancer treatment, and hip surgeries.'**

Perhaps most importantly of all, young people changed how they voted. Figure 4 shows that slightly fewer voted Labour in the youngest age group, than the next youngest. The Greens were most popular among the young, but so too, perhaps surprisingly, was Reform UK. Ever since 2017, a growing number of adults have been choosing not to vote at all for any of the options on offer.

Figure 4: How people said they would vote by age in 2024



Source: <https://www.focaldata.com/blog/how-britain-voted-2024>

The promise of the 2024 General Election was not so much what was in the manifestos, or even what we learnt Labour might do in government in its first weeks. The promise was that the future would be different. And yet those with more stake in the future (the young age groups) were not enthusiastic in voting for this offer. Rather the voting pattern potentially shows one of growing dissent. In all age groups around four in ten of all voters did not choose to support either of the two main parties, and more than three out of every ten people who could have voted choose not to, at least not this time. Both proportions combined produce a historic high of majority dissent. Only 34 per cent of the electorate voted Labour or Conservative. Whether this reflects a lack of ambition within the manifestos to tackle the real challenges of inequality and poverty, a consequence of a very tactical, anti-Conservative election, or early signs that the contemporary political ideas are no longer resonating with the public, will only become apparent over the coming years.

Danny Dorling is Halford Mackinder Professor of Geography at the University of Oxford and a Fellow of St Peter's College. He is a patron of RoadPeace, Comprehensive Future and Heeley City Farm. He has published over 50 books, including the best-selling [Peak Inequality: Britain's Ticking Timebomb](#) (2018) and [Injustice: Why Social Inequality Still Persists](#) (2014).

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