

Landslide victory against Tories, but collapse in Labour's popular vote heralds UK government of crisis

Chris Marsden
5 July 2024

Sir Keir Starmer's Labour Party has won a landslide election victory against the Tories, despite making almost no gain in its popular vote outside Scotland. While Labour won a 170-seat majority, with 412 seats against 121 seats for the Tories, Labour's share of the national vote was just 33.8 percent.

Labour's 170 seat majority is its largest since 1997 under Tony Blair, but its national share of the vote is up by just 2 percent since 2019, and five percent lower than under Jeremy Corbyn in 2017 when Labour lost narrowly on a much higher voter turnout of over 68 percent.

Labour takes power with the lowest share of the popular vote of any incoming government in British history.

Its victory was won off the back of a mass anti-Tory vote. The Conservatives recorded their lowest ever vote. The party suffered a massive 20-point decline since 2019, with 11 senior ministers losing their seats, including former prime minister Lizz Truss, Defence Secretary Grant Shapps and prominent Brexiteer Jacob Rees-Mogg.

Outgoing prime minister Rishi Sunak, who retained his seat, has resigned as party leader.

Starmer made no voting gains in major urban centres, where there were significant victories for candidates opposing Labour over the Gaza genocide and huge abstentions of almost half the electorate with a national turnout of 60 percent, the second lowest since 1885.

Starmer has no popular mandate for his pro-business Tory continuity agenda, above all his plans to thrust Britain into a direct confrontation with Russia at the July 9 NATO summit in Washington D.C.

Far from heralding a Labour honeymoon, social and political tensions rooted in morbid levels of inequality and hardship presage explosive confrontation with the working class.

Amid a slew of headlines hailing Starmer's victory, Channel 4's political editor Gary Gibbon accurately described the result as a "loveless landslide".

Labour's main gains came via the collapse of the Scottish National Party (SNP), while also picking up several Tory seats. It secured a 17-point increase in Scotland, with the SNP's vote down 15 points, losing almost 40 seats to Labour, including all six Glasgow seats.

Had Nigel Farage's right-wing nationalist Reform party not taken a huge slice of the Conservative vote, the result would have been far narrower.

Reform won 14 percent of the vote. This gave the anti-immigrant party only four seats under Britain's first-past-the-post constituency system, including Farage winning in Clacton. But in 98 constituencies they came second, beating the Tories and handing Labour the prize.

Labour suffered a 4 percent fall in Wales. Its overall vote in England saw no change except a six-point increase where it captured former Tory seats.

Starmer's relentless pro-business, militarist and nationalist message won backing in the Tory shires, Murdoch's *The Sun* and *Times*, and *Financial Times*, but only alienated workers.

The *Financial Times* reported: "In the 63 safest Labour seats heading into the election, the party's average vote share decreased from 67 percent to 50 percent."

The most significant electoral shifts in working class constituencies, especially those with Muslim populations over 10 percent and where Labour's vote fell by 11 percent on average, was the vote for candidates opposing Starmer's obscene support for Israel's genocide on Gaza.

Four pro-Palestinian Independents beat Labour, while expelled leader Jeremy Corbyn trounced Labour in Islington North by 24,120 votes to 16,873—by around 50 percent.

In Dewsbury and Batley, Iqbal Mohamed beat Labour by almost 7,000 votes.

In Blackburn, Adnan Hussain beat Labour by around 200 votes, while Workers Party of Britain candidate Craig Murray came third with more than 7,000 votes.

In Leicester South, Jonathan Ashworth, Labour's shadow Cabinet Office minister, with a massive majority of more

than 22,000 votes at the last election, was beaten by Shocket Adam by around 1,000 votes.

In Birmingham Perry Barr, Labour lost to independent Ayoub Khan by 500 votes. Other leading Blairites were hammered including Jess Phillips, whose majority was slashed from over 13,000 to 693, by Workers Party candidate Jody McIntyre.

Independent Leanne Mohamad lost to Labour Shadow Health Secretary Wes Streeting by just over 500 votes, and Workers Party leader George Galloway lost Rochdale, the seat he won four months ago from Labour by 1,400 votes.

Keir Starmer's own share of the vote fell by a massive 17,757 votes in Holborn and St Pancras, halving since 2019. Independent Andrew Feinstein came second with more than 7,000 votes or 19 percent of the vote, while the Greens won 4,000 votes. Turnout was just 54 percent.

This lent an air of unreality to Starmer's victory speech, posturing as the herald of "change" and a new unified national purpose. He invoked his role in purging Corbyn and his thousands of supporters from the party, reciting Labour's paean to national unity: "country first, party second".

This, he said was "not a slogan—it's the guiding principle of everything we have done and must keep on doing—on the economy, on national security, on protecting our borders."

He made clear: "The changes we've made are permanent, irreversible and we must keep going. We ran as a changed Labour Party and we will govern as a changed Labour Party."

What does this mean in reality?

The Socialist Equality Party's general election manifesto insisted:

Sir Keir Starmer wants to form a government that continues the Conservative Party's support for the Gaza genocide and the UK's leading role in the US-led war with Russia...

War on this scale demands an escalation of the savage austerity that has already left young people and working-class families struggling to survive. The ruling class is demanding an end to the peace dividend, which means a final death blow must be delivered to the National Health Service, social care, and all essential services to pay for war.

"This is accompanied by a whipping up of nationalism and anti-immigrant xenophobia over the need for 'strong borders' that is fuelling the rise of the far-right. A combined frontal assault on democratic rights has already begun with the campaign to criminalise protests over Gaza using lying accusations of antisemitism."

Our candidates, Tom Scripps in Holborn and St Pancras and Darren Paxton in Inverness, Skye and West Ross-shire, explained that the building of a new and genuinely socialist leadership must begin now and advanced a socialist and internationalist programme on which this new leadership must be built.

We called for the formation of a mass movement against genocide and war based on four essential principles:

1. A movement against genocide and war must be based in the working class, which will fight and die in war, and be forced to pay for it. The same capitalist crisis that produces war also produces the basis for ending war, in the form of growing struggles against inequality, poverty and the attack on wages, jobs, healthcare, education and all the social rights of the working class.

2. It must be completely independent of and hostile to all political parties and organisations of the capitalist class, the Labour Party above all.

3. It must be international, uniting workers in every country and on every continent on the basis of their common class interests. The escalating global war, like World War I and World War II, arises out of the contradictions of the world capitalist system. A new global conflagration can only be averted through the mobilisation of the world working class, which produces all of society's wealth and therefore has the social and economic power to oppose the conspiracies of the capitalist ruling elites.

4. It must be anti-capitalist and socialist. There can be no serious struggle against war except in the fight to end the dictatorship of finance capital and the economic system that is the fundamental cause of war.

These are the central issues of perspective on which the working class, its younger generation in particular, must base the struggle against Starmer's government of austerity, repression and war.



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact