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Could Reform UK's surge in the polls translate into power?

A number of recent polls place Reform UK at first or second place. The electoral system makes it difficult for this surge to translate into power, but the volatility of the electorate makes it possible.

Laura Serra and Jenevieve Treadwell highlight the gender and age dynamics of Reform's would be voters.

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Over the past few weeks, Reform UK has enjoyed a substantial surge in vote intention polls, with several research agencies placing it as the **largest** or **second largest** party in the country.

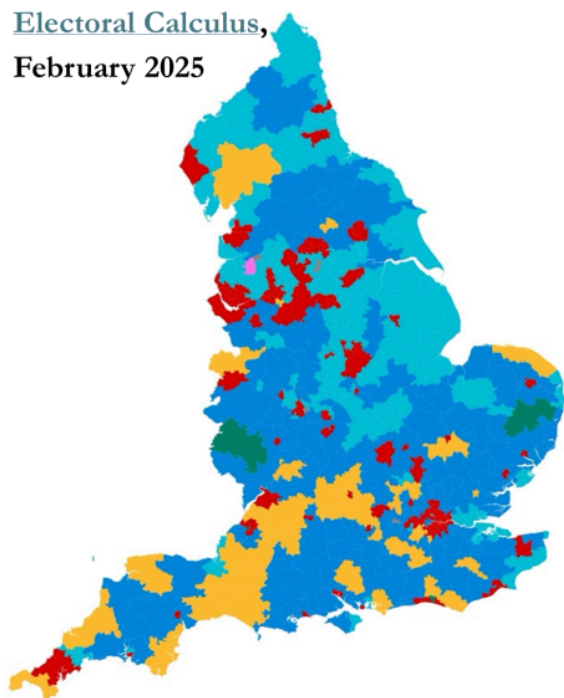
The party delivered a surprising result at the July general election, when it managed to gain over 14 per cent of the vote after a very hurried campaign. This growing momentum failed to translate into a huge parliamentary presence because of the nature of the British electoral system.

Despite winning 2 percentage points more in votes than the Liberal Democrats, Reform went home with only 5 seats relative to 72 seats for the Liberal Democrats. But their sustained growth in support suggests that the party's fortunes may well be very different at the next election.

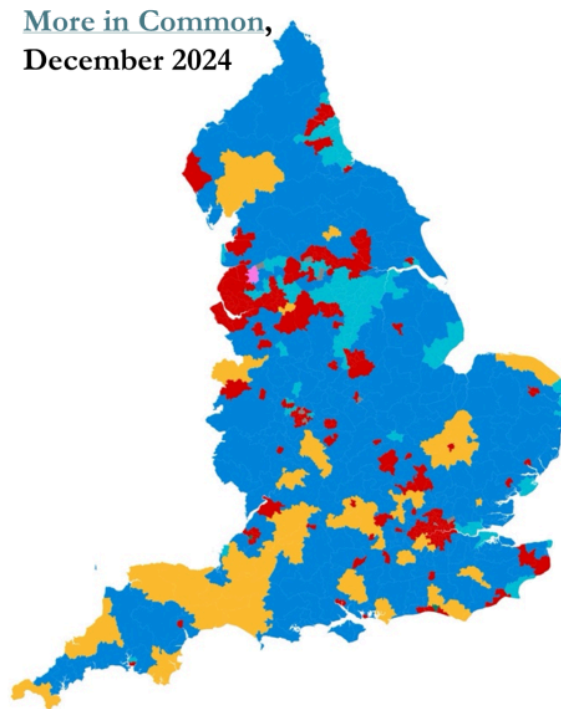
Polling since the election has found increased appetite for Reform, but how this will translate into seats is still very unclear. More in Common's MRP (multilevel regression post-stratification), conducted in **December 2024**, found that Reform could expect to win 72 seats if an election were held today, but would come second in 206 additional seats (right-hand map). Electoral Calculus's January MRP predicted that Reform would win in 175 seats and come second in 219 seats (left-hand map).

"If a general election was called tomorrow, how would you vote?"

Electoral Calculus,
February 2025



More in Common,
December 2024



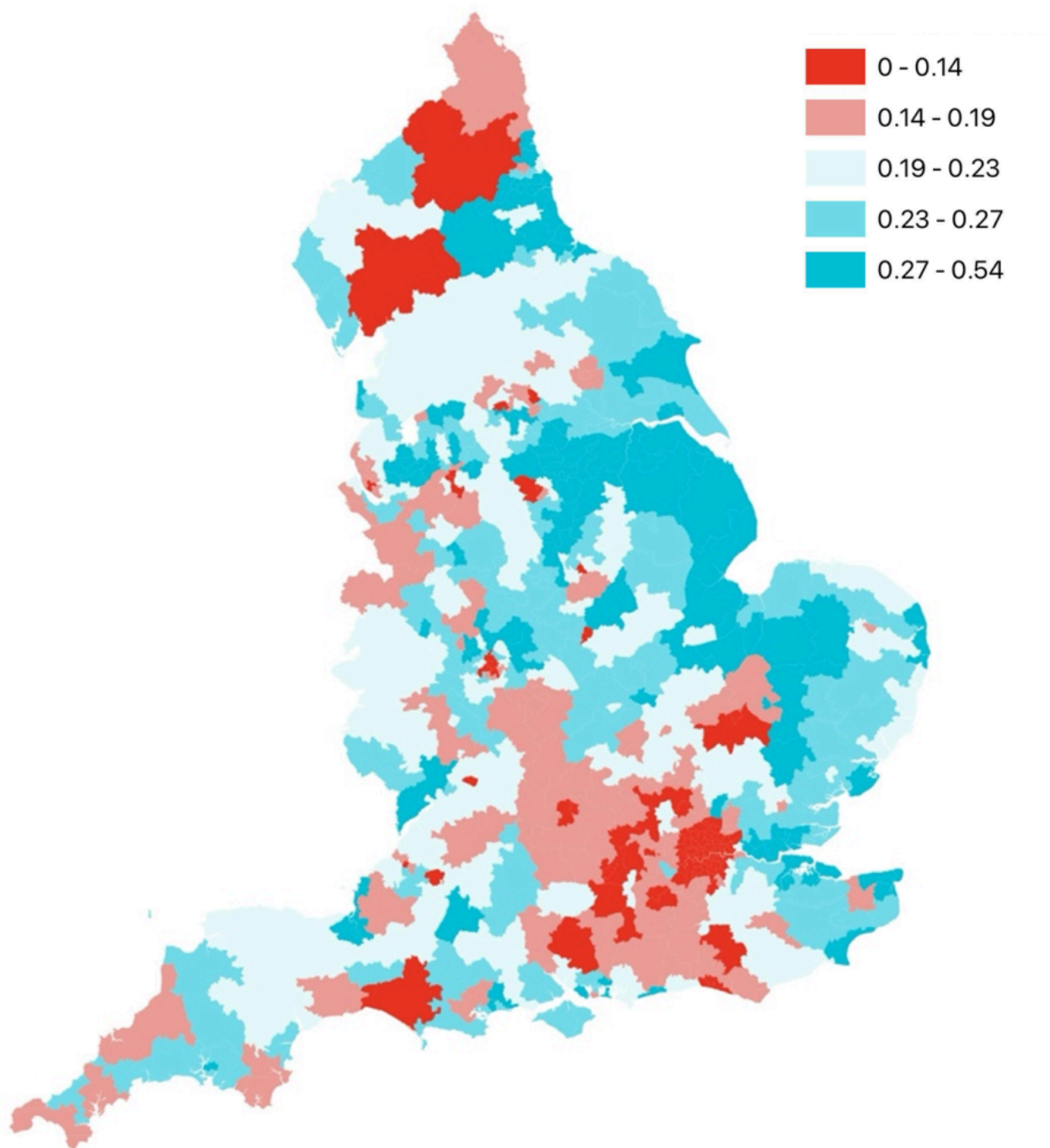
The high degree of difference between these maps reflects a political landscape which is much harder to predict than it was historically. There are three main reasons for this.

A volatile electorate

Firstly, party loyalty is waning. Increasingly, voters are far more willing to **switch parties** and are no longer governed by a sense that they owe something to political actors or groups. Secondly, political preferences have fluctuated a lot in the last few years, with voters much more comfortable moving between parties and voting between cultural and economic factors. Finally, there are a lot more horses in the race, making many constituencies **more competitive** than before.

Reform is riding this wave. A young party, it has been able to create strong networks of support in constituencies across the country since it was founded in 2018. Across England, Reform has the highest growth potential of any of the third parties. In July, Reform came second in 98 seats, the Greens were second in only 36 seats and the Liberal Democrats were second in only 27.

Vote intention: strength of Reform support by English constituency, December 2024



Source: *More in Common*

London – an anti-Reform Bulwark or just slower to turn?

While most of England is becoming less aligned and more fragmented, and in many cases more likely to vote Reform, London remains almost relatively stable and less open to Reform.

On the whole, the party is not doing very well in London. According to More in Common's polling, **London is the least Reform-leaning region**. At the election, around a tenth of Londoners voted for Reform compared to 16 per cent in the rest of England. And since the election, while support for

Reform has grown everywhere in England – up by 8 per cent, **in London it has grown slower** – 3 per cent.

And at first glance there is a lot less growth potential for Reform in London when compared to other parties. Of the 75 seats in London, 59 were won by Labour, 9 by the Conservatives, 6 by the Liberal Democrats and 1 by an Independent. By looking at who came second-place in these seats we can identify who has the most to gain in the capital.



London has a smaller share of past Reform voters and current Reform switchers, but it has a higher share of people who say they would consider voting Reform in the future.



The Conservatives have the most room to grow in London, coming second in 36 seats, the Greens were second in 14 seats, in 9 seats Labour was second, Reform was second in just 4 and the Liberal Democrats in just 2.

In some seats, the race is incredibly close. Even a constituency like Barking, which was leave voting and seen by many as a **credible Reform opportunity**, is neck-and-neck with the Greens, both parties on 14 per cent in the borough.

But this doesn't mean that Londoners won't get there. London has a smaller share of past Reform voters and current Reform switchers, but it has a higher share of people who say they would **consider voting Reform in the future**.

Share that have voted for Reform, intend to vote for Reform and are considering voting for Reform in London and the rest of England, January 2025.

Source: *More in Common*

That means that while they did not vote for Reform and would not choose Reform if an election was held tomorrow, they are open to voting for Reform in the future. This is being driven by younger Londoners.

The age pattern of Reform backers in London is **unlike the rest of the country**. In the rest of England, the likelihood of voting or considering Reform increases amongst older voters, from 29 per cent (18-34) to 32 per cent (35-64) to 34 per cent (65+). But in London, while older people are more likely to have voted Reform in 2024, 18- to 34-year-olds are more likely to intend to vote or considering voting for Reform now than older Londoners. What's more, people aged 18 to 34 in London are more likely to be considering voting for Reform than voters of the same age living in the rest of England.

Vote intention: share of support for Reform UK in London and the rest of England by age, January 2025.

Source: *More in Common*

The openness of younger people to Reform is not unique to London

In the past, younger voters tended to reject the right and vote for more left-wing parties, relative to older age groups. But across Europe this pattern has been changing. Younger voters are exhibiting growing levels of support for the far-right. At the **German federal election** last week, a majority of voters aged under 24 cast their ballot for the far-left party *Die Linke* (25 per cent), but the far-right *AfD* was the second largest party across this age group (20 per cent). This adds to a growing list of European elections where younger voters are defying traditional expectations by increasing their support for the populist right, and while Britain so far has been **somewhat of an exception**, recent polls suggest the British youth may be catching up with their continental peers.

Reform support varies greatly by *gender*

The move to the right is also a very male phenomenon. Across every age group, support for Reform is higher amongst men than it is amongst women. Instead of the gap closing for younger people as once might have been expected, 18- to 24-year-old women and men are one of the most polarised groups, with young men twice as likely as women of the same age to intend to vote for Reform. This growing divide has been attributed to the fact that many young men today feel disillusioned with mainstream parties, particularly on issues like immigration, national identity, and economic prospects.

Vote intention: share of support for Reform UK in England by age and gender, January 2025

The trend isn't unique to the UK, rather it reflects broader shifts in male political realignment towards the right across **several established democracies**. Scholars have noted how the extent of the gender divide **varies across countries** and tends to be shaped by the prevailing socio-political context.

In societies with strong religious traditions and tightly knit communities, both men and women are encouraged to conform. Countries marked by economic dissatisfaction, social media echo chambers, cultural influencers (such as **Andrew Tate**), and increasing liberalisation, tend to see greater gender divisions. In this view, the rise of women in journalism and publishing, alongside policies promoting gender equality (e.g., quotas and positive discrimination), has led some men to perceive disadvantage in the labour market, pushing them towards conservative politics.



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These patterns are further shaped by generational differences, as young people today have grown up amid financial crises rather than sustained economic growth, fostering a “zero-sum” mindset where someone else's gain is perceived as a personal loss. The widening **gender gap in higher education**, with young women outpacing young men in university enrolment, further exacerbates these divisions.

Overall, Reform UK's rise in support highlights broader shifts in British politics, from the weakening of party loyalty to growing generational and gender divides. While the party's immediate electoral prospects remain uncertain due to the complexities of the UK's electoral system, its expanding base—particularly amongst disaffected men and younger voters—suggests it is poised to remain a significant force. London's slower shift towards Reform reflects regional variations, but growing openness amongst younger voters signals potential for change. Whether this momentum translates into sustained electoral success will depend on how the party navigates an evolving political landscape and capitalizes on shifting voter sentiments.

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Laura Serra is a Postdoctoral Research Officer at the Electoral Psychology Observatory, a research unit within the LSE Department of Government. Her research explores how voters' characteristics, particularly age, and parties' programmatic outlooks influence political attitudes and behaviours. Laura's PhD research on the widening voting age gap in British partisanship was awarded the 2024 McDougall Trust Prize for the best dissertation in the field of elections, electoral systems, and representation by the Political Studies Association.

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