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The Most Disproportionate UK Election: How the Labour Party Doubled its Seat Share with a 1.6-Point Increase in Vote Share in 2024

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Abstract
The Labour Party doubled its seats in the 2024 UK general election, winning a landslide majority with only a 1.6 point increase in its UK vote share and an historically low vote share for a winning party at just under 34 per cent. This article provides new evidence for three constituency-level explanations for this outcome in the context of anti-incumbent voting. First, the local race increased tactical voting between Labour and the Liberal Democrats where races were perceived to be competitive. Second, Reform UK lowered the threshold needed for Labour to take more constituencies—particularly from the Conservatives—with greater constituency fragmentation on the political right. Third, Labour outperformed its national success in Scotland, gaining larger swings with a double 'anti-incumbent' vote. These patterns are critical to understanding the 2024 general election and are informative for the stability of Labour's electoral coalition. Labour's 2024 majority rests on factors largely unrelated to its own electoral popularity and which are unlikely to remain stable between now and the next general election.

Keywords: 2024 UK general election, efficiency, votes-to-seats, tactical voting, fragmentation, anti-incumbency, constituency voting, first past the post

THE 2024 UK GENERAL ELECTION broke records. It was the most fragmented election on record, with the highest proportions of votes for minor parties of any UK election. It also demonstrated the lowest combined vote share for the two largest parties, Labour and the Conservatives. It was the most volatile election recorded by the British Election Study (BES) measured as the proportion of voters switching parties between elections since 1964–1969.[1] It was also the most disproportionate election: the total of the differences between the seat shares and vote shares of each party was the highest ever measured by the Gallagher index.[2] The Labour Party—achieving 411 seats on a UK vote share of just under 34 per cent—broke the postwar record for the lowest vote share of a party forming a majority government.

At first glance, the 2024 UK general election appears to represent a major deviation—especially from the elections immediately prior to it. The 2017 and 2019 'Brexit elections' saw a sharp decrease in fragmentation and a decrease in volatility.[3] However, UK politics was on a clear trajectory towards greater volatility and fragmentation up to and including the 2015 general election.[4] Prior to 2017,

[1]J. D. Griffiths, et al., 'The Brexit realignment amid electoral volatility: The role of party blocs in the 2024 General Election (Working paper, 2024),' Available at SSRN: https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=5048763

[2]R. Cracknell, C. Baker and L. Pollock, 'General election 2024 results', *House of Commons Library*, 24 September 2024; https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/cbp-10009/; M. Gallagher, 'Proportionality, disproportionality and electoral systems', *Electoral Studies*, vol. 10, no. 1, 1991, pp. 33–51.

[3]E. Fieldhouse, et al., *Electoral Shocks: The Volatile Voter in a Turbulent World*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2019; https://library.oapen.org/bitstream/handle/20.500.12657/47106/9780198800583.pdf; J. Green, '2019: a critical election?', in N. Allen and J. Bartle., eds., *Breaking the Deadlock: Britain at the Polls, 2019*, Manchester, Manchester University Press, 2021, ch. 7, pp. 174–197.

[4]Fieldhouse, et al., *Electoral Shocks*.

Table 1: Wasted, surplus and effective Labour Party votes, 2015–2024

	Wasted votes		Surplus votes		Effective votes		Votes in GB
	n	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*
2015	4,333,747	46.4	2,581,383	27.6	2,432,607	26.0	9,347,273
2017	5,537,963	43.0	3,823,228	29.7	3,517,251	27.3	12,877,918
2019	5,157,123	50.2	2,696,149	26.3	2,416,179	23.5	10,269,051
2024	2,110,748	21.7	4,387,297	45.2	3,211,493	33.1	9,708,716

increasing fragmentation was making coalition governments more likely.[5] By 2024—in stark contrast—fragmentation delivered a landslide majority for Labour, doubling its seat share on only a 1.6 point increase in vote share. The 2024 general election was exceptional for its disproportionality and the doubling of Labour's parliamentary seats on such a small increase in the vote share.

It cannot be empirically adjudicated in the space available here on the motives behind the factors illustrated, except that the context of a very strong anti-Conservative sentiment is undoubtedly critical to all three. The reasons for the Conservatives' losses of support arose owing to a series of 'competence shocks' in the form of the Covid crisis and the scandals of Covid lockdown breaches in Downing Street.[6] The inflationary crisis combined with the mini-budget and market response in the autumn of 2022 added to these competence shocks. By May 2024, just before the general election was called on 22 May, BES data showed that only 10.4 per cent of Britons approved of the job that the UK government was doing.[7] This context is highly consistent with a strong tactical vote in 2024 to oust the Conservatives, contributing to fragmentation overall and the substantial fragmentation of support on the right, with previously Conservative voters switching to Reform UK. It enriches the context of Labour's recovery in Scotland and the double anti-incumbency bonus for Labour there, with the combination of an unpopular government in Westminster and in the devolved Scottish government. Within this context, understanding how Labour doubled its seats on a 1.6 point increase in vote share provides insight into the UK electorate, how to interpret the outcome for Labour and the possible future of UK politics.

Electoral efficiency in the 2024 general election

The 2024 general election saw an exceptional degree of 'electoral efficiency' for Labour. Efficiency denotes how votes translate into seats: the larger a party's seat share relative to their vote share, the higher their electoral efficiency. In a first-past-the-post (FPTP) system, this 'seat to votes' ratio will largely depend on how votes are distributed across local contests. A party will gain more seats with fewer votes when these votes are concentrated in seats that they did not lose and when those seats are secured with smaller majorities.[8]

Table 1 applies Johnston, et al.'s calculations of efficiency, comparing 2024 to 2019, 2017 and 2015 for Great Britain via calculations of 'wasted votes' (all votes cast for defeated candidates), 'surplus votes' (votes cast for winning candidates above what they needed) and 'effective votes' (votes cast for winning

[5]J. Curtice, 'So what went wrong with the electoral system? The 2010 election result and the debate about electoral reform', *Parliamentary Affairs*, vol. 63, no. 4, 2010, pp. 623–638.

[6]J. Green and W. Jennings, *The Politics of Competence: Parties, Public Opinion and Voters*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2017; Fieldhouse, et al., *Electoral Shocks*; J. Green, G. Evans and D. Snow, 'The Covid-19 pandemic in Britain: a competence shock and its electoral consequences', *Political Studies*, 2024.

[7]E. Fieldhouse, et al., *British Election Study Internet Panel Waves 1–29*, British Election Study, 2024; https://www.britishelectionstudy.com/data-object/british-election-study-combined-wave-1-29-internet-panel/.

[8]M. Linton and M. Southcott, *Making Votes Count: The Case for Electoral Reform*, London, Profile Books, 1998.

candidates that contributed to the candidate winning; this is the number of votes for the second placed candidate plus one).[9] Labour increased its proportion of surplus votes in 2024 and more than halved its proportion of wasted votes, contributing to a sizeable increase in effective votes in 2024 compared to the three elections prior.

Table 1 shows that the number of overall votes cast for Labour was lower in 2024 than in 2019 and 2017, reflecting both lower turnout and the reduction in vote shares for the two largest parties in 2024 (compared to the 2017 and 2019 elections which saw unusually high two-party shares). Compared to 2015—the last election with high fragmentation—Labour's raw vote total was slightly higher in 2024.

The exceptional nature of the 2024 election is shown in Figures 1a and 1b. Figure 1a shows the proportion of seats gained by Labour in elections since 1945 (bold line) and the proportion of votes (dashed line), showing the largest ever increase in seat shares relative to vote shares in 2024. Labour's more disproportionate outcomes coincide with winning elections, consistent with the UK's majoritarian system awarding a 'winners' bonus' in terms of seats relative to votes as well as other forms of electoral bias.

The exceptional nature of 2024 is clearer still when these relationships are displayed as the ratio between seats and vote shares. These are shown in Figure 1b for Labour, the Conservatives and the Liberal Democrats. This shows how many seats each party won for each percentage of their national vote share, revealing just how disproportionate the outcome was for Labour and unusually proportionate it was for the Liberal Democrats. Both parties increased their seat tallies—for Labour, from 202 in 2019 to 411 in 2024 and the Liberal Democrats from eleven to seventy-two—on extremely small increases in their UK-wide vote shares. Labour increased its vote share marginally from 32.1 per cent to 33.7 per cent, while the Liberal Democrats rose equally marginally from 11.5 per cent to 12.2 per cent.[10] The fact that these two parties increased their electoral efficiency in tandem is not coincidental: progressive voters backed either Labour or the Liberal Democrats when those parties were in competition with the Conservatives and the race was perceived to be close. Both parties thus benefitted from tactical voting where it was most vital.

The disproportionate outcomes in Figures 1a and 1b need to be compared to the relative absence of proportionate seat gains relative to vote share gains for Reform UK and the Green Party. Reform UK increased its vote share by 12.3 points (winning 14.3 per cent of the UK vote compared with the Brexit Party in 2019) and gained five seats—a much lower seat tally compared to the Liberal Democrats who secured a lower overall vote share of 12.2 per cent. The Greens won 6.7 per cent of the national vote and four seats. Both seat tallies were new achievements for these parties. Neither Reform UK (nor its predecessors) nor the Greens had gained more than one MP prior to 2024. Winning five seats on 14.3 per cent of the vote for Reform UK was a large gain in contrast to predecessor party UKIP which won 12.6 per cent of the UK national vote in 2015—its highest previous share—and only one MP (in Clacton). Nevertheless, these results contributed to the overall high degree of disproportionality in the 2024 election as measured by the Gallagher index, providing an overall score for all differences between the percentages of votes and seats for parties in any system. It was also unusual, in 2024, that seats were won by six independents.

Sustained by the party becoming increasingly popular among younger and higher educated voters, the 2015, 2017 and 2019 general elections saw Labour accumulate votes in areas where the party was already likely to win, particularly urban centres.[11] This seemed to be a major problem for social

[9]R. Johnston, D. Rossiter and C. Pattie, 'Disproportionality and bias in the results of the 2005 general election in Great Britain: evaluating the electoral system's impact', *Journal of Elections, Public Opinion and Parties*, vol. 2, 2006, pp. 37–54.

[10]Cracknell, Baker and Pollock, 'General election 2024 results'.

[11]Fieldhouse, et al., *Electoral Shocks*; M. Sobolewska and R. Ford, *Brexitland*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2020; J. Curtice, 'The geographical challenge: how winning elections has become much more difficult for Labour', *The Political Quarterly*, vol. 88, no. 1, 2017, pp. 13–19; R. Ford, et al., *The British General Election of 2019*, Switzerland, Springer Nature Switzerland AG, 2021.

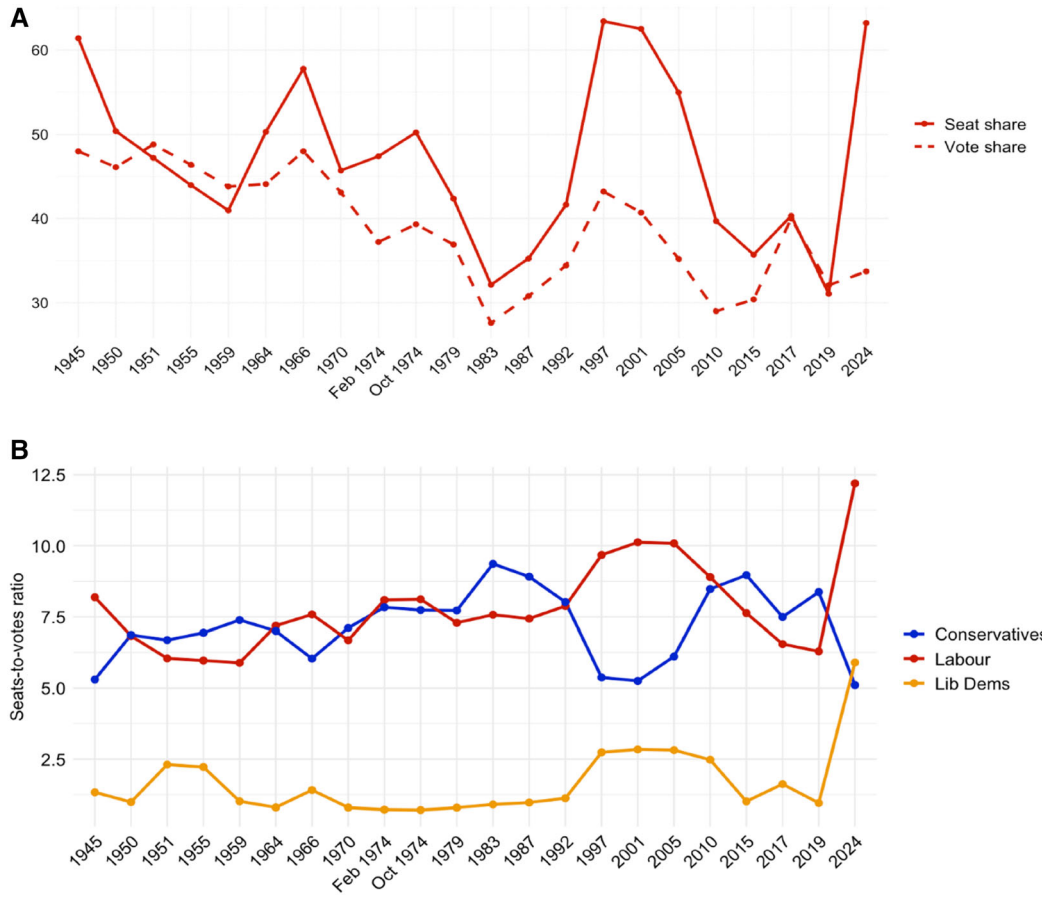

Figure 1: A. Labour Party vote share and seat share in UK general elections, 1945–2024, B. Ratio of seats to vote share in UK general elections, 1945–2024

democratic parties across different contexts as age and education divides have restructured party competition along a rural-urban divide that traditional centre-left parties have been struggling to bridge.[12] Aside from its size, Labour's 2024 election outcome is therefore important to understand because it broke with this geographical deadlock. Importantly, it did so whilst age and education continued to represent a key demographic dividing line in voter choice—for Labour and the Conservatives—and steeply across the left-liberal and right-socially conservative blocs as the Brexit-induced realignment continued.[13]

At the constituency level, Labour's increased efficiency is the product of three important patterns of results. These are shown in Figure 2, which plots all the constituencies that Labour held and gained in 2024 comparing, in each seat, the size of the party's majority in 2019 against their change in vote share achieved between the two elections. The top half of the figure shows the seats the party held. Amongst these constituencies, Labour lost votes in 'safer' seats where they had bigger majorities in 2019 and gained

[12]J. A. Rodden, *Why Cities Lose: The Deep Roots of the Urban-Rural Political Divide*, New York, NY, Basic Books, 2019; J. Furlong and W. Jennings, *The Changing Electoral Map of England and Wales*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2024.

[13]Griffiths, et al., 'The Brexit realignment'.

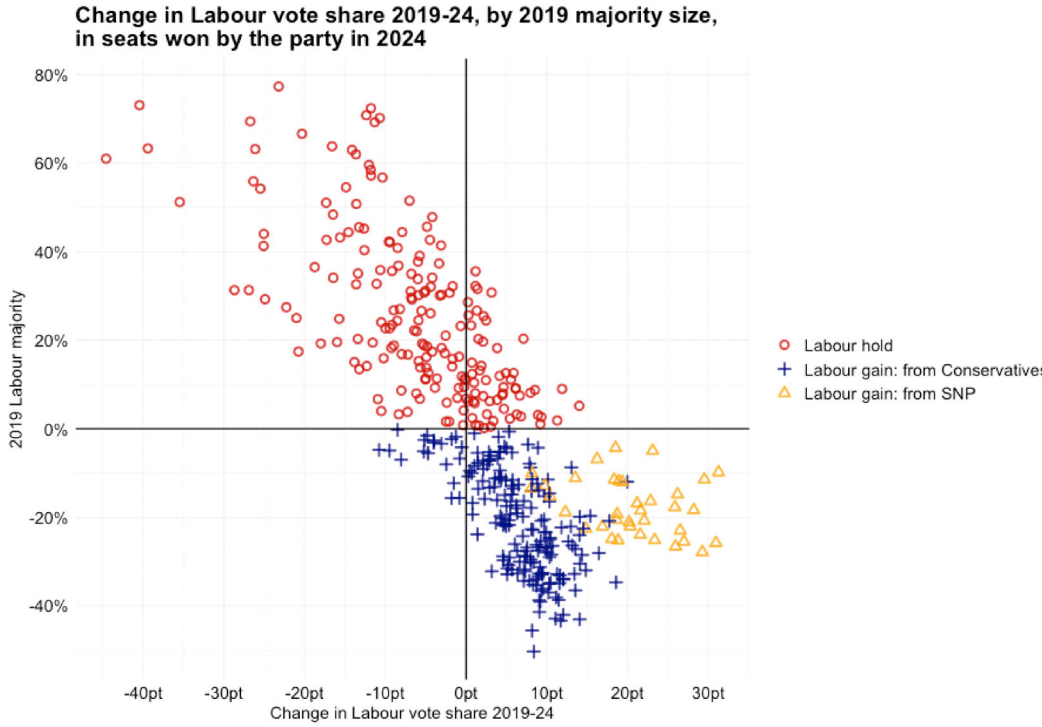

Figure 2: Change in Labour vote share, 2019–2024, by 2019 majority size, in seats won by the party in 2024

votes in more marginal constituencies. This reduced the number of 'surplus' votes in seats the party already held, whilst reducing any 'wasted' votes that would emerge through Labour losses of their more marginal seats.

The lower half of the plot shows the seats the party gained. Labour gained seats from the Conservatives despite increasing their vote share by very little. In most cases, the change in Labour vote share between 2019 and 2024 was significantly small relative to the party's distance from contention. In a handful of seats present in the lower-left quadrant of the plot, Labour made gains from the Conservative despite a decline in their vote share in 2024. Not only did Labour reduce its majorities in the seats it held, but it gained seats with lower vote shares than would have previously been needed to win. Lastly, Figure 2 shows that Labour achieved larger swings in seats gained from the SNP, where Labour was in closer contention in 2019. Larger swings to Labour in Scotland—where Labour gained 16.7 percentage points in vote share on 2019 support—makes a disproportionately large contribution to the UK votes-seats ratio shown in Figure 1b.

Tactical and sincere voting in the 2024 general election

Voters are said to vote 'tactically' when they cast their ballot for a party/candidate other than their first choice, for an alternative that has a greater chance of winning or to prevent an undesirable outcome. 'Sincere' voting, on the other hand, takes place when a voter chooses the party/candidate they like the most.[14] Although in the UK's FPTP electoral system both the local and national outcomes

[14] A. Blais and A. Degan, 'The study of strategic voting', in R. D. Congleton, B. Grofman and S. Voigt, eds., *The Oxford Handbook of Public Choice, Volume 1*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2019.

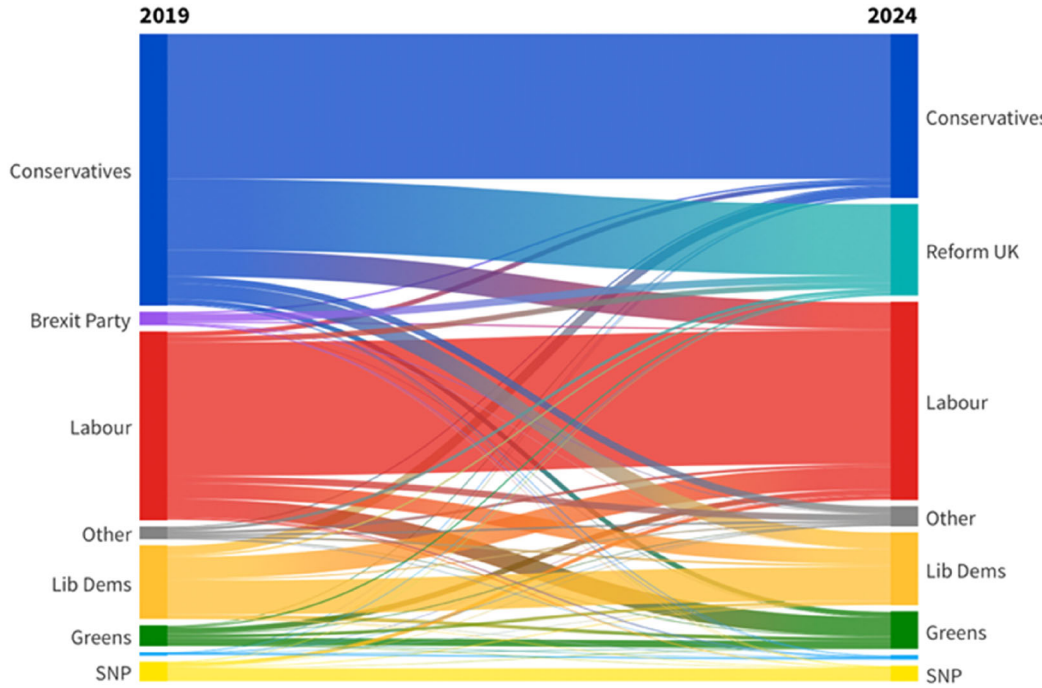

Figure 3: Vote flows between the 2019 and 2024 UK general elections, GB sample, British Election Study internet panel post-election waves

can prompt strategic considerations for voters, tactical voting tends to be first and foremost found at the constituency level.[15]

It would be expected that tactical and sincere voting contributed to Labour's efficiency in 2024. Tactical votes given to Labour may have helped the party win in constituencies where the party stood a chance of winning, whilst tactical voting for parties which were not Labour in seats where the party was not one of the two frontrunners will have reduced 'wasted' votes in constituencies the party did not win. Similarly, sincere voting for other parties in seats where Labour already had a large majority may have reduced surplus votes, making its overall vote distribution more efficient.

Figure 3 below shows the vote flows between 2019 and 2024 using the BES internet panel data.[16] As Griffiths, et al., show, the sorting of the electorate within the left-liberal progressive category and the right-socially conservative category was an important feature of 'party bloc' voting in the 2024 general election.[17] Strategic voting is expected to take place primarily within the framework of these blocs: when a voter's preferred party is not one of the two frontrunners in a given constituency, tactical voters should rally behind another party from the same ideological bloc to prevent a party from the opposing bloc from winning. Figure 3 shows that the Labour Party mainly gained votes from the Conservatives and the Liberal Democrats, while losing an equal amount to the Liberal Democrats and the Greens. The largest net losses in this period

[15]G. W. Cox, *Making Votes Count: Strategic Coordination in the World's Electoral Systems*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1997; P. R. Abramson, et al., 'The effect of national and constituency level expectations on tactical voting in the British general election of 2010', in L. B. Stephenson, J. H. Aldrich and A. Blais, eds., *The Many Faces of Strategic Voting: Tactical Behaviour in Electoral Systems Around the World*, Ann Arbor, MI, University of Michigan Press, 2018, pp. 28–60.

[16]Fieldhouse, et al., *British Election Study Internet Panel Waves 1–29*.

[17]Griffiths, et al., 'The Brexit realignment'.

were within the right-wing bloc, with voters moving away from the Conservatives and towards Reform UK. For a table with the full values from Figure 3, see Appendix 2.

Using the BES surveys at the constituency level, the mechanisms of tactical voting can be assessed through how perceptions of the local race influenced vote choice for respondents' preferred parties.[18] It can be established which party each respondent preferred as the party with the highest score on the 0–10 'dislike-like' party scales, choosing those where the preferred party had a score of 5/10 or higher. Whether sincere or tactical is not reviewed. While it would be useful to analyse whether respondents voted for some strategic reason—for example, considering that Labour may win in a specific seat regardless—the sample sizes of non-voters in the BES do not permit this. Moreover, respondents who hold perceptions of the constituency race would be expected to be more likely voters, in general.

To understand sincere and tactical voting, two key predictors can be highlighted: the type of local race voters think is taking place in their constituency (who they perceive the two frontrunners to be) and how close they think this race is. Both are calculated using the BES's 'winConstituency' variables, in which respondents score the likelihood of each party winning in their constituency. It is particularly important to use perceptions of the constituency races to understand tactical or sincere voting. Not only are these direct measures of the perceived closeness of the race vital to inform how voters make their subsequent decision at the ballot box, it is also important because voters' perceptions of the local race could be different to the objective reality which may arise from partisan bias as well as other sources of error. In Appendix 1 it is shown that—based on the 2024 outcome—while many respondents were correct about which two parties were frontrunners in their constituency, some types of races were significantly over-estimated. More than three in twenty respondents (16.5 per cent) thought they were in a Labour versus Liberal Democrat two-horse race constituency, whereas the true proportion of BES respondents living in seats where Labour and the Liberal Democrats were the first two parties in 2024 was 1.3 per cent. Therefore, while the mechanisms of tactical voting as perceived and evidenced by BES respondents can be illuminated, this can only be said to be suggestive of the causal explanation for the pattern of seats—perceptions may not correctly match to the actual competitive context in respective constituencies, even if they do so quite well overall, as shown in Appendix 2.

It was first analysed whether the probability of respondents voting for their preferred party changes depending on the perception of the type of local race in which they will vote. Using a binomial regression, it was examined whether the likelihood of respondents who had, by this time, voted in the general election (the post-election BES Wave 29) for the party they said they preferred when interviewed during the campaign wave (Wave 28) was determined by which two parties they perceived to be most likely to come first and second in their constituency. Figure 4 displays the predicted probabilities from this model for left-liberal parties alongside the percentage of all BES respondents who think they are in each type of local race (the constituency race). Appendix 3 provides the full model and variable information.

Figure 4 shows some initial evidence of tactical voting on the left: respondents are less likely to vote for their preferred party when this party is not one of the two frontrunners in their seat. This is most evident for voters who prefer either Labour or the Liberal Democrats: while Labour 'preferers' are very likely to vote for Labour in seats where the party is seen to be one of the two frontrunners, the predicted probability of them voting Labour in Conservative versus Liberal Democrat contests is significantly lower. Similarly, Liberal Democrat preferers are more likely to vote for the Liberal Democrats in seats where the party was in contention as opposed to when it was not. In all instances, the Greens were less likely to vote for their preferred party overall. This was most pronounced in Conservative and Liberal Democrat races and least evidenced if the race was perceived as a top-two Labour-Green Party competition.

This model cannot explain whether respondents who did not vote for their preferred party in certain local races rallied behind the

[18]Fieldhouse, et al., *British Election Study Internet Panel Waves 1–29*.

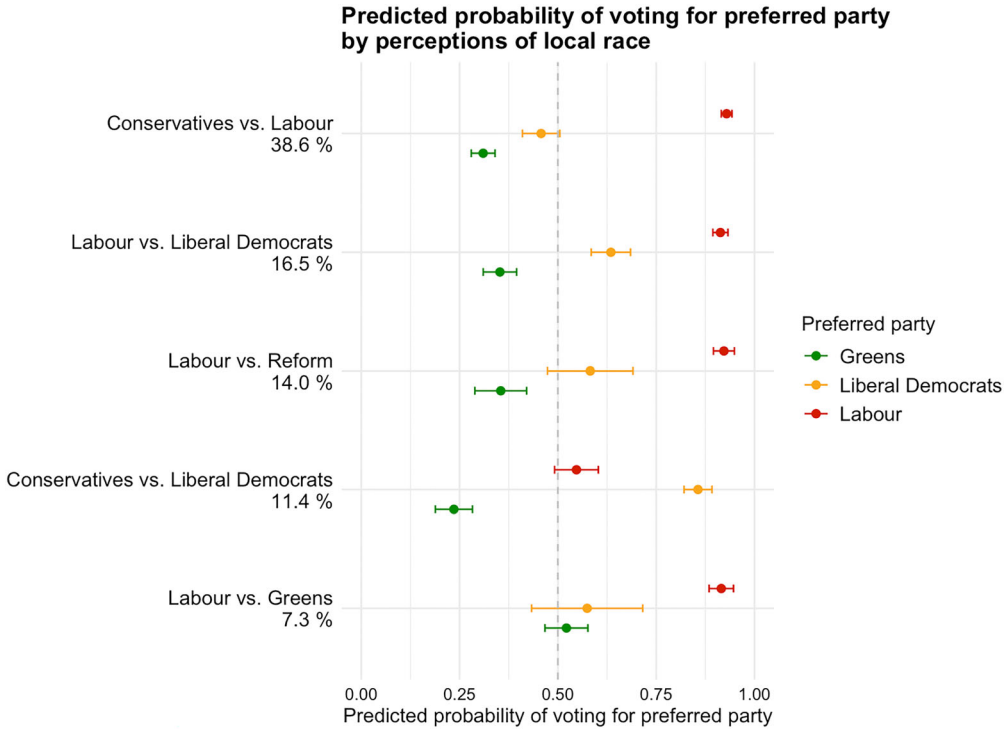

Figure 4: Voting for a preferred left party by perceived constituency race type, British Election Study internet panel, waves 28 and 29, 2024

other left-wing party they perceived had a better chance of winning. It also cannot be known how close these races are: Conservative versus Labour races, for instance, could vary from close marginals to safe Conservative or safe Labour seats. This should make a difference to tactical voting as strategic voting rests on the assumption that the voter believes their vote can have an impact on the outcome in their constituency.

Figures 5a, b and c focus in on these points by looking at whether respondents with given party preferences voted for Labour, the Liberal Democrats and the Greens in different types of local race by perceived closeness of the race. The predicted probabilities are derived from the interaction terms between the perceived type of race and closeness of the race within generalised additive models (GAMs), which allow smoothed non-linear relationships on the outcome—voting Labour, voting Liberal Democrat or voting Green. Strategic and sincere voting would predict non-linear likelihoods across different perceptions of the local race. Appendix 4 contains the full model and variable information.

Figure 5a shows evidence of tactical voting in favour of Labour on behalf of respondents who prefer the Liberal Democrats in perceived marginal races where Labour needed votes to win against the Conservatives, as well as where the race was not as close. As seen in Figure 4, Liberal Democrat preferers were less likely to vote for their preferred party in Labour versus Conservatives races. Demonstrated in the left hand side panel in Figure 5a, these votes largely went to Labour. This tactical voting was more likely if the race was perceived as close and less likely if either Labour or the Conservatives were expected to win the constituency safely.

The plotted probabilities in the right-hand side panel are also consistent with expectations from Figure 4. Liberal Democrat preferers were unlikely to vote for a party that was not the Liberal Democrats in Conservative versus Liberal Democrat races and, therefore, regardless of the closeness of said race, they

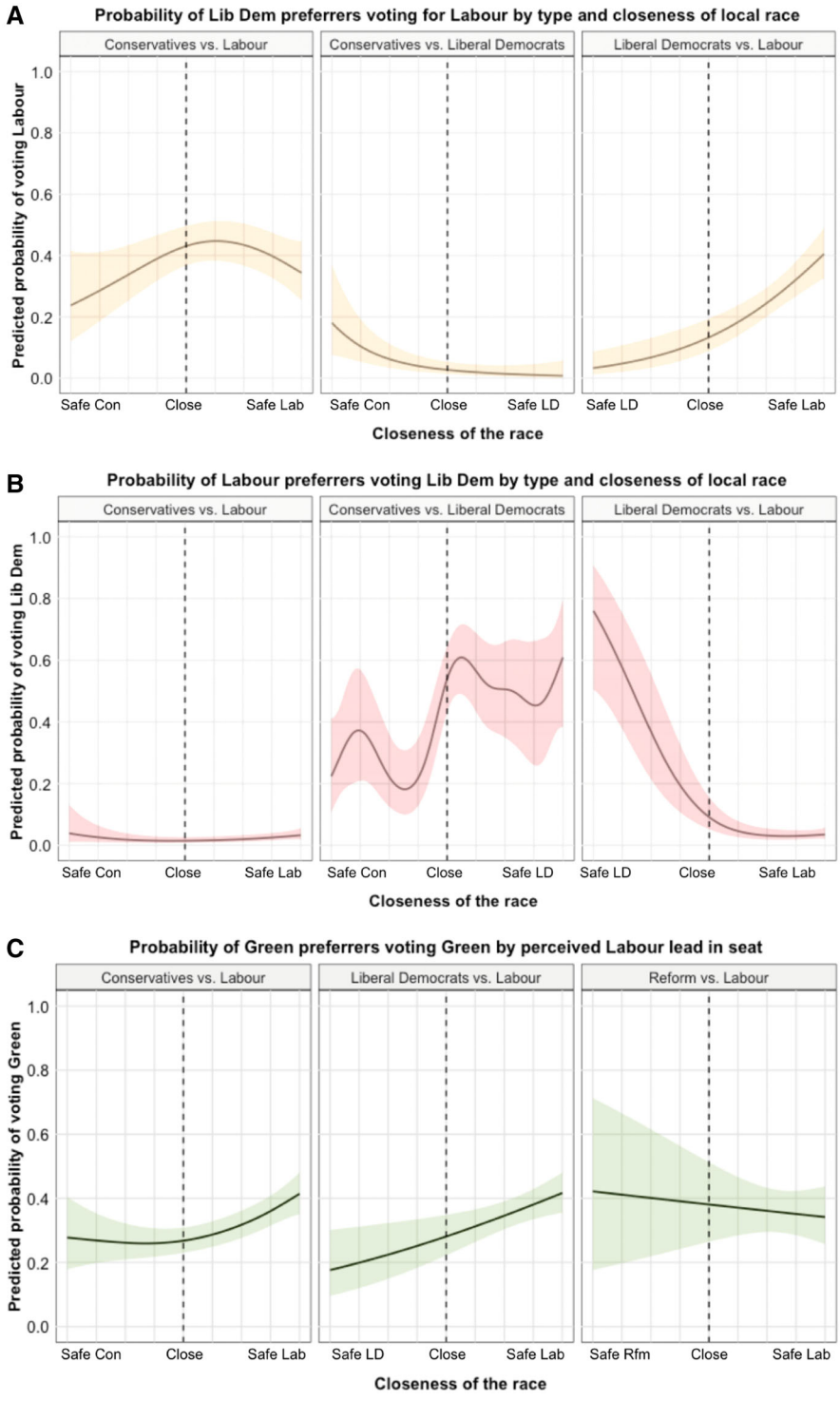

Figure 5: A. Voting Labour if Liberal Democrats preferred, by closeness of race, British Election Study, 2024, B. Voting Liberal Democrat if Labour preferred, by closeness of race, British Election Study, 2024, C. Voting Green if Greens preferred, by closeness of race, British Election Study, 2024

are unlikely to vote Labour. This is consistent evidence with Labour drastically reducing its proportion of 'wasted votes' in 2024: the party received fewer votes in seats that it did not win (as perceived by BES respondents). Interestingly, in perceived Liberal Democrat versus Labour races, the relationship between which party is ahead and Liberal Democrat preferers voting Labour is linear; evidence suggests that Liberal Democrat voters got behind Labour more when they thought they lived in a safe Labour constituency. This implies one counter-mechanism to electoral efficiency and those votes could potentially be contributing to the proportion of surplus votes in Table 1. There was minimal voting for Labour among Liberal Democrat preferers in Conservative and perceived Liberal Democrat constituencies, as would be expected.

The opposite facet of Labour/Liberal Democrat tactical voting is shown in Figure 5b above. This shows evidence of voters who prefer Labour voting for the Liberal Democrats in constituencies where Labour is not perceived to be a frontrunner. Evidenced is a sharp increase in voting Liberal Democrat if the race was perceived to be close between the Conservatives and the Liberal Democrats, but very low probabilities of voting Liberal Democrat in a Conservative versus Labour race, consistent with tactical voting. Where the Liberal Democrats were perceived to be in competition with Labour—noting that these perceptions were mostly inaccurate—Labour preferers voted more for the Liberal Democrats if they thought they were in a safe Liberal Democrat constituency.

Together, these results suggest a high degree of affinity between Labour and Liberal Democrat voters, voting within their party bloc in order to stop Conservative gains, but voting for the other party within the left-liberal bloc when they perceived the other party to be the strongest locally.

The perceived closeness of races is particularly important to assess sincere voting on the left. Although Figure 4 shows that voters who prefer the Greens are consistently unlikely to vote for their preferred party in all types of races, this might not be the case when they think Labour is significantly ahead in their constituency. Figure 5c provides evidence of this. Here, it would be expected that there would be more Green votes where Labour was further ahead if Green preferers were voting sincerely when they thought Labour would win anyway. This is shown on the left hand side and middle panels of Figure 5c. The same 'help' is not evidenced towards the Liberal Democrats in a perceived safe Liberal Democrat race. The wider confidence intervals on the right-hand side panel denote the smaller proportions of Green preferers believing they are in a Reform-Labour race, but in this context Green Party voting is unaffected by the perception of the closeness of the race. These analyses provide evidence for strategic voting within the liberal-left bloc between Labour and the Liberal Democrats and of greater sincere Green Party voting when Green preferers thought that Labour would safely win in their constituency. This perceptual evidence is consistent with the efficiency of Labour and Liberal Democrat votes in 2024 and—insofar as they align with the constituency-level results—can help to explain how those vote losses to the Greens and Liberal Democrats that Labour suffered (shown in Figure 1) likely failed to harm Labour as much as may have been expected.

While Labour and the Liberal Democrats benefitted from tactical and sincere voting on the left, the same types of tactical choices were not as evident among right-wing parties. The most frequent second preference for voters who preferred the Conservatives was Reform UK and vice versa, with 52 per cent of Conservative preferers ranking Reform UK second and 72 per cent of Reform UK preferers ranking the Conservatives second. Only just over 6 per cent of Reform UK preferers chose Labour as their second most preferred party (see Appendix 1 for full cross-tabs). This was one of the crucial consequences of the Brexit realignment in 2019: so much of the 2019 Conservative support was comprised of 'Leave' voters that any flow to Reform UK would almost inevitably come from the Conservatives.

Despite this, Figure 6 shows very little evidence of tactical voting between the two parties. On the Conservative side, voters who preferred the Tories were almost as likely to vote Conservative, regardless of whether they thought their party was a frontrunner or whether they lived in a Labour versus Reform constituency. Similarly—although to a lesser extent—Reform UK preferers tended to vote

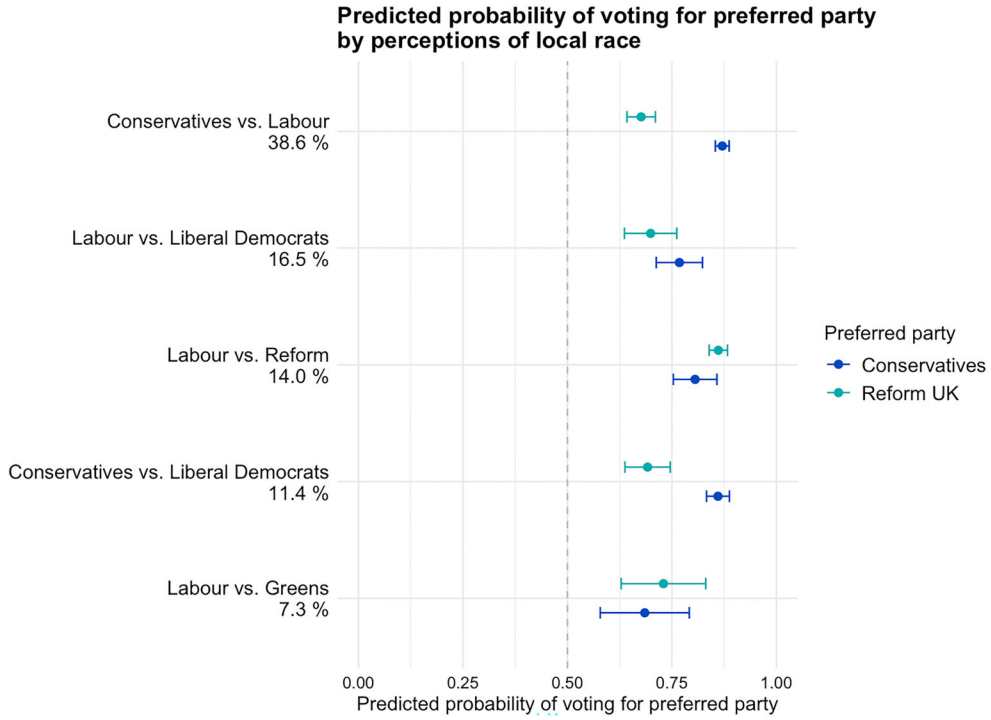

Figure 6: Voting for a preferred right party by perceived constituency race type, British Election Study internet panel, waves 28 and 29, 2024

for Reform UK regardless of the type of local race. Compared to Conservative preferers, Reform UK preferers were somewhat less likely to vote for their preferred party in perceived Conservative versus Labour or Conservative versus Liberal Democrat races, but the magnitude of this tactical voting seems to be weaker than the coordination on the left.

Figure 7 below confirms these insights according to the perceived closeness of the different types of constituency races between Reform UK and Conservative voters. Reform voters were no more likely to vote Conservative if they thought Labour could win a constituency or if they thought the Liberal Democrats could win a constituency. In both cases, confidence intervals overlap across the interaction term for closeness of race. Conservative preferers were no more likely to vote strategically for Reform UK if they perceived the race to be between Labour and Reform UK (see the right-hand side panel). These results suggest that any effect of warning of a Labour 'supermajority' in 2024—as stated by the Conservatives towards the end of the election campaign—likely had little effect at the constituency level where the Conservatives could try and stop a Labour candidate from winning. See Appendix 4 for the full model and variable information. As noted in Figure 3, this weaker evidence of tactical voting on the right substantiates the fact that the right-wing vote was split between the Conservatives and Reform.

Fragmentation on the right: lowering the bar for Labour gains

While the overall fragmentation of the 2024 general election is one of its most distinctive features along with its disproportionality, the pattern of constituency-level fragmentation in England is predominantly a story on the right. This is consistent with—and a consequence of—the conclusions drawn above on tactical voting on the left versus sincere voting on the right: whilst left-wing voters cooperated to rally behind whichever party had the best

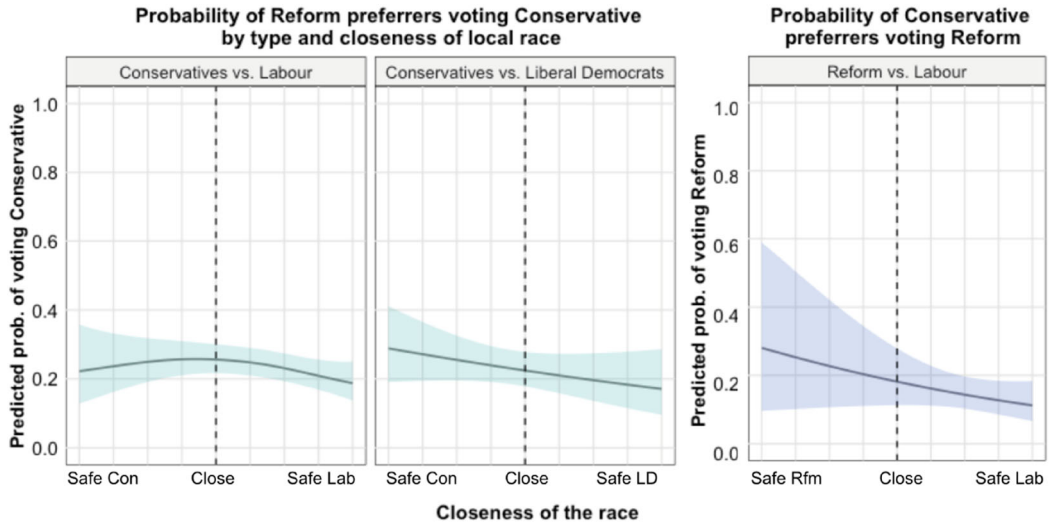

Figure 7: Voting Conservative and Reform by various preferred parties and closeness of race, British Election Study, 2024

chance of winning at the local level, right-wing voters did this less so.

Reform UK running in almost every UK constituency in 2024 split the right-wing vote. The Brexit Party—Reform UK's immediate predecessor, also led by Nigel Farage—had taken votes from the Conservatives in 2019, but had only stood candidates in opposition-held seats.[19] Its overall impact on electoral fragmentation on the right was therefore larger in 2024 when Reform UK ran in Conservative-held seats as well. They achieved a UK-wide vote share of 14.3 per cent, marginally higher than UKIP in 2015 (12.6 per cent) and gained greater support in constituencies with higher proportions of leave voters, where the Conservatives had previously been more successful.[20] As seen in Figure 3, most Reform voters in 2024 came from 2019 Conservative voters: the proportion of 2019 Conservative voters comprising Reform UK's 2024 vote share (according to BES data) is 77 per cent, while most Conservative vote losses between the two elections were to Reform UK.

This asymmetrical fragmentation at the constituency level can be seen in Figure 8, plotting the effective number of parties (ENP) within each ideological bloc for each 2024 Labour gain in England—all of which were from the Conservatives. ENP measures are calculated as the inverse of the sum of the squared vote shares for each party at the constituency level.[21] This is done within each ideological bloc in Figure 8 and only considers the main parties within each bloc in England. This measures how concentrated or fragmented the vote is within each bloc. On the right-wing side, it shows how spread out the vote is between the Conservatives and Reform UK. An ENP value of two indicates that each party received the same number of votes, which together constitute 100 per cent of the vote on the right. On the left-wing side, the ENP values reflect how concentrated the vote is between Labour, the Liberal Democrats and the Greens; the vote shares of all three add up to 100 per cent of the vote on the left.

[19]J. Curtice, S. Fisher and P. English, 'The geography of a Brexit election: how constituency context and the electoral system shaped the outcome', in Ford, et al., *The British General Election of 2019*, pp. 461–494.
[20]O. Heath, et al., 'The 2024 general election and the rise of Reform UK', *The Political Quarterly*, forthcoming, 2025; https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1111/1467-923X.13484

[21]M. Laakso and R. Taagepera, '"Effective" number of parties: a measure with application to west Europe', *Comparative Political Studies*, vol. 12, no. 1, 1979, pp. 3–27.

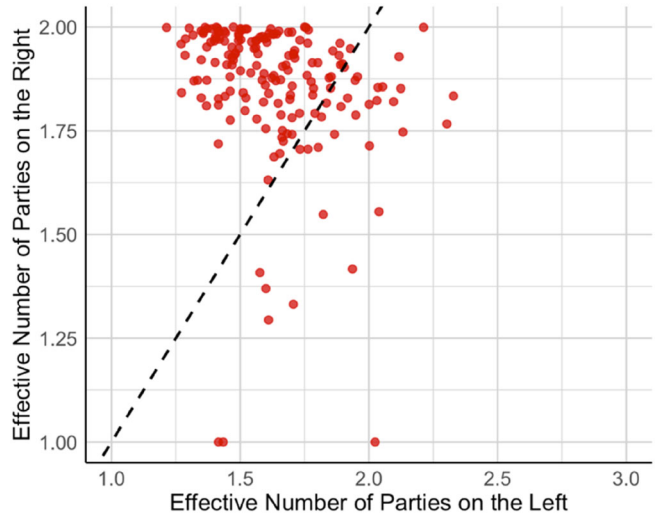

Figure 8: Effective number of parties (ENP) on the right and left in each seat Labour gained from the Conservatives in England in 2024

Figure 8 shows that Labour's 2024 gains from the Conservatives contain significantly higher levels of fragmentation on the right than on the left. In almost all seats, the pooled Conservative and Reform votes were spread across 1.75 to two 'effective parties', indicating that the right-wing vote was essentially split in half. In contrast to this, not only is the pooled left-wing vote less fragmented, but it is concentrated amongst fewer effective parties despite there being three main parties on the left and two on the right.

The consequence of this fragmentation on Labour's electoral efficiency is that it helped the party win constituencies from the Conservatives on a lower share of the vote. Figure 2 showed that most Labour gains from the Conservatives had been achieved with small—at times even negative—changes in the Labour vote share compared to the party's distance from contention. These same constituencies are shown in Figure 9 which shows the share of the Labour, Reform and Conservative votes in each Labour gain in England, ordered by size of the Labour vote. Labour gained many seats from the Conservatives on relatively small pluralities of the vote and these were largely facilitated by a split in the right-wing vote. This right-wing vote—in many cases—would have been greater than the Labour vote, if combined.

These patterns will be important for a future UK general election. They mean that, in constituencies where Labour is competing, the marginality is likely to be greater on the right and more sensitive to small changes in vote share, while the opposite will be true on the left. Whether left-liberal parties continue to vote strategically to keep out the Conservatives—thereby reducing constituency-level fragmentation on the left—obviously remains unknown and may well be determined by the degree to which the Conservatives choose to win votes further to the right—where they could tip the balance—or on the left—where they may not. But their decisions about how to compete—and its implications for their party image and perceived ideological positions—may also sustain tactical voting within the left bloc, presenting an electoral dilemma for the Conservatives.

Larger Labour swings in Scotland

Scotland was an important Labour electoral stronghold for decades up to 2015 when the Scottish National Party (SNP) won fifty-six seats—just shy of 95 per cent of the total Scottish Westminster seats—and leaving Labour with only one Scottish MP. The 2024 election saw Labour mount a recovery in Scotland, winning 35.3 per cent of the vote and thirty-seven MPs, although Labour's Scottish vote share was not far ahead of the SNP's vote share, which was 30 per cent.

Distinctive features of the constituency race in Scotland were the high proportion of marginal constituencies (meaning there was the

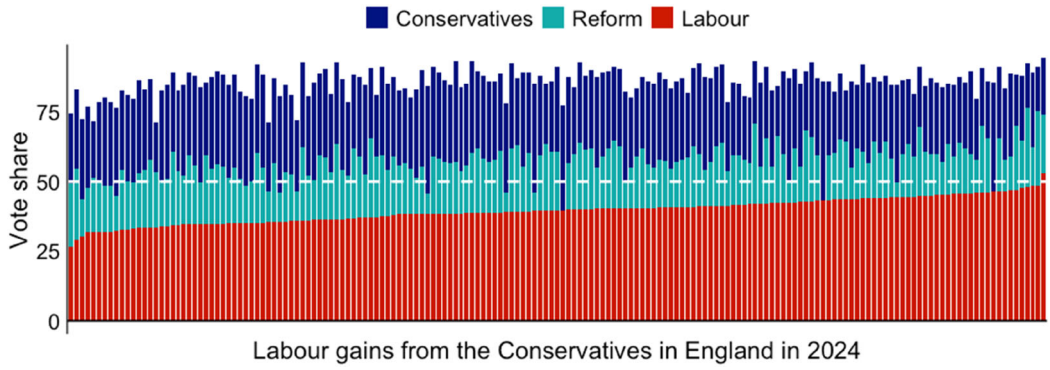

Figure 9: Labour, Reform UK and Conservative vote shares in seats Labour gained from the Conservatives in England, 2024

potential for larger numbers of seat changes on smaller swings) and the high rates of tactical voting in Scotland around Scottish independence, with pro-independence voters aligning with the SNP and pro-Union voters siding with the best-placed unionist party.[22] The 2024 swings in Scotland of Labour gains from the SNP—shown in Figure 2—were substantially larger than Labour's gains in England. They also happened in seats where Labour was less far behind, reflecting the marginality of seats. Labour exceeded the size of the swing required in Scotland, with a notably different pattern in its Scottish gains. In one sense, then, Scotland contributes to a less efficient Labour vote, contributing to the number of wasted votes in Table 1. However, for the UK overall, the higher proportion of seat gains on a minimal change in UK vote share (given the size of Labour's vote compared to its UK-wide vote share) contributes to the unusually high seat shares relative to vote shares shown in Figures 1a and 1b.

The context of the election in Scotland was two unpopular incumbents: the Conservatives in Westminster and the SNP in the devolved government in Edinburgh. As both the SNP and the Conservative Party saw an erosion of their support, Labour made gains in voting intention north of the border. The decline in SNP support coincided with Nicola Sturgeon's resignation as first minister in February 2023, which was quickly followed by a divisive leadership context and a scandal involving the use of SNP finances, implicating both the departing first minister and her husband, SNP chief executive, Peter Murrell. Humza Yousaf, Sturgeon's successor, then resigned after just thirteen months in the job and two weeks before the 4 July election was announced. The context of two unpopular governments was unique in Scotland and is shown in Table 2 below, demonstrating the proportions disapproving of either government in Westminster or Scotland,

Table 2: Percentage of BESIP respondents approving of UK and Scottish government performances in 2019, 2021 and 2024.

	2019	2021	2024
Approve of both governments	3.33	10.1	3.77
Approve of UK govt, Disapprove of Scottish govt	7.83	14.4	8.32
Approve of Scottish govt, Disapprove of UK govt	52.3	57.2	29.2
Disapprove of both governments	36.5	18.3	58.7
N	1 734	1 465	1 515

Source: British Election Study internet panel waves 17 in 2019, 21 in 2021 and 27 in 2024. 'Don't knows' are excluded from the percentages.

[22]R. McInnes, 'General election 2019: marginality', *House of Commons Library*, 7 January 2020; https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/general-election-2019-marginality/; A. Henderson, et al., *The Referendum that Changed a Nation: Scottish Voting Behaviour 2014–2019*, London, Palgrave Macmillan, 2022.

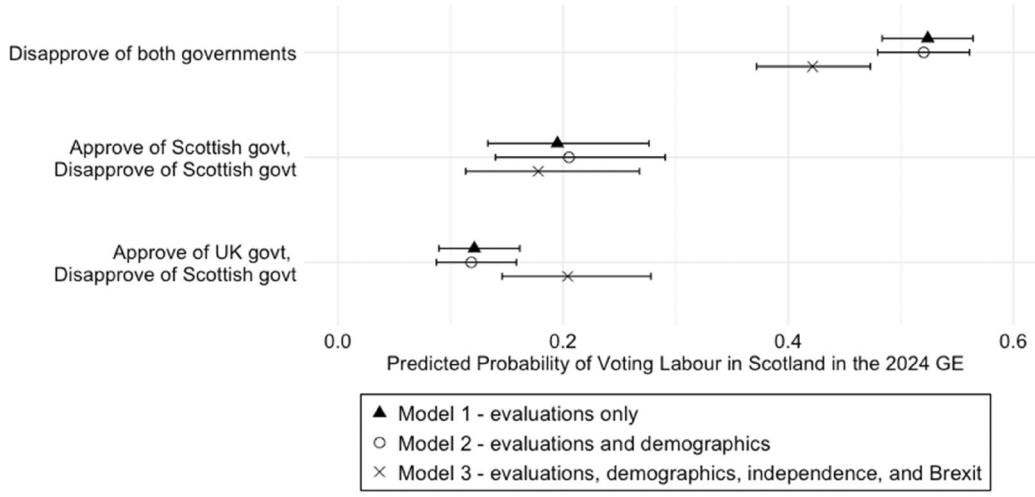

Figure 10: Predicted probability of voting Labour in Scotland by multilevel government evaluations

derived from BES survey questions. These were, 'do you approve or disapprove of the job that each of the following are doing?' asked for the UK government and the Scottish government, with answers on a scale where 1 was 'strongly approve' to 5 which was 'strongly disapprove'.

There was double anti-incumbency potential for Labour in Scotland, benefitting in Westminster from Conservative travails and in Scotland from the SNP's difficulties, too. In 2019 and 2021 (the two years for which the BES questions were asked), the distinctive pattern in Scotland was that the Scottish government was evaluated more positively than the UK government. By 2024, the overriding sentiment was that Scots disapproved of both governments.

The impacts of these assessments can be modelled by vote choice for Labour in Scotland, estimating the effect of voter evaluations of both governments measured at the end of May 2024—just over one month before the election—on voting for Labour as opposed to any other party on 4 July 2024. Figure 10 displays the predicted probabilities of voting Labour for respondents who disapprove of both governments, only approve of Westminster performance, or only approve of Holyrood. For each, there are three coefficients: the first from a model with these evaluations only; the second with demographics; and the third with independence and Brexit preferences as further statistical controls. The full model results can be found in Appendix 5.

These results show that—in all instances—the likelihood of voting Labour in Scotland was substantially higher if respondents evaluated both the Westminster and Scottish governments negatively, rather than just one; this holds even when controlling for demographic and constitutional factors. This double anti-incumbency 'bonus' is not the only story in Scotland, but it helps to understand the larger swings towards Labour north of the border, increasing its Scottish vote share by 16.7 points. This contributed to Labour's majority with an additional thirty-six MPs on a minimal overall UK-wide increase in vote share of 1.6 points.

Conclusions

Each election provides a benchmark with which the next election is compared. Understanding the reasons for Labour's landslide majority in the 2024 UK general election—winning 411 seats on a vote share of less than 34 per cent—is central to making sense of the changes and trends in the long time-series of general elections, as well as for what will matter—and what may happen next. The 2024 general election is fascinating in its own right for its exceptional features, too. Despite

2024 being a return to and continuation of the pre-2017 trend of increasing fragmentation and volatility in British elections, the British electorate, under the FPTP electoral system, delivered a large majority for Labour under high fragmentation and disproportionality.

Evidence was provided to understand this disproportionality in the context of the strong anti-incumbent sentiment against the Conservative Party when the election was called; the uniquely high degree of electoral efficiency for Labour (as well as for the Liberal Democrats) in 2024; the degree to which strategic tactical voting helped Labour (and the Liberal Democrats); Reform UK's support overwhelmingly came from previously Conservative voters, splitting the right-wing vote and thus lowering the bar for Labour to make gains with negative swings; and relatively small pluralities in large numbers of seats. Labour benefitted in Scotland from larger swings, contributing to a more disproportionate votes-to-seats ratio in the UK as a whole, partly through both incumbents in Scotland and Westminster being uniquely unpopular.

The evidence presented here raises interesting questions about whether the outcome should be seen as a 'success' for Labour. To a large degree, progressive party voters acted to ensure the Conservatives lost seats and—it can be assumed, for the largest part—preferred a Labour win to a Conservative win. Those who voted Liberal Democrat and Green in perceived safe Labour races—contributing to fragmentation and likely a lower Labour share of the vote overall—at least showed consent for a Labour government, if not a direct vote for it. Perhaps had it not been so widely stated that Labour would win the election with a majority, Labour's vote share might have been higher, had more constituencies been perceived to be close. To be sure, however, the resounding win in seats should not distract from Labour's relatively low winning-party vote share. It was the distribution of these votes that gave Labour its majority.

This distribution is central to understanding what may happen next. The factors highlighted here—efficiency, tactical and sincere voting, fragmentation on the right and the double anti-incumbency bonus in Scotland—are not major structural changes in British politics; they all have the potential to be different in the next general election, because they are all contingent on what happens over the next five years across UK politics.

It could be expected that tactical voting could reverse if the Conservative Party is not viewed as negatively as it was in 2024, or if Labour is viewed more negatively as well: voters' incentives to remove the Conservatives will be different now that the Conservatives are out of power, as will the Liberal Democrats' ability to maintain a high level of concentrated, local support. It should also be noted how unusual and difficult it is for parties to increase their popular support in government and how exceptional the coalition and 'Brexit election' shocks were when the Conservatives did achieve this, although Labour's low current vote share might make it slightly easier for it to find ways to make gains.[23]

Among Labour's 2024 gains, where the Reform UK vote share made the constituency-winning threshold lower, a marginal change in Conservative, Labour and/or Reform UK support could have larger implications for many seats, because so many of those constituencies are highly fragmented, much like multiple party competition has contributed to marginality in Scotland. In Scotland, Labour is not going to be able to benefit from a double anti-incumbency bias in the next general election, since Labour will be the Westminster incumbent, though it may still benefit from especially low confidence in the Conservatives in Scotland. If the SNP was to lose control of the Scottish government in the 2026 Scottish Parliament elections and if Labour was to win these, it could itself suffer from being the incumbents in both settings, if it had anything near the high disapproval ratings that were in evidence among Scottish voters towards both governments in 2024.

Can Labour take credit for the distribution of votes to seats in 2024? Two factors suggest the role of other considerations besides Labour Party 'agency' on the 2024 outcome. The first is that whatever targeting strategy Labour used, voters' perceptions of the local race would have been heavily influenced by the national

[23]Green and Jennings, *The Politics of Competence*; Fieldhouse, et al., *Electoral Shocks*.

commentary and consensus that Labour would win a large majority, contributing to perceptions of the constituency-level outcome, alongside any campaigning or targeting effects. The second is the important context of a very strong anti-Conservative sentiment, underpinning strategic and sincere voting, the fragmentation on the right and the anti-incumbency benefits to Labour in Scotland. It is in this anti-incumbent context that the FPTP system delivered a large majority under fragmentation, whereas earlier fragmentation delivered narrow majorities for the Conservatives. The additional impact of any strategic mobilisation in 2024 cannot be known; nor of the outcome had Labour not taken such a cautious approach to its reputation, but any effects should be considered in this broader important context of Conservative failures—something outside Labour's control.

In many respects Keir Starmer was the lucky beneficiary of a host of Conservative and SNP travails; to be so again in a future general election—as a party of government—is undoubtedly far more unlikely. How the Conservatives opt to compete on the left—with Labour and the Liberal Democrats—and on the right—with Reform UK—will also be critical to Labour's continued success. At least in terms of seats, the Conservatives should not be written off next time around, given the unstable nature of the features underpinning Labour's majority.

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Appendix 1

descriptive statistics of main variables

A.1 Preferred party, England only

This variable indicates which party each respondent likes the most. It was created with the British Election Study Internet Panel's 'like [party]' scales, where respondents rate each party on a 0–10 scale. Ties and NAs—which include all cases where respondents had scored no party over 4/10—were excluded. More details on ties below.

Party	N	Valid per cent (%)	Percentage of all respondents in England (%)
Labour	3823	26.3	18.0
Reform UK	3194	22.0	15.1
Greens	3166	21.8	14.9
Conservatives	2862	19.7	13.5
Liberal Democrats	1492	10.3	7.0
Tie	4898	–	23.1
NA	1762	–	8.3

Second preferences cross-tabulation (only respondents without a 'tie'):

		Second preference					
		Labour	Greens	Lib Dems	Cons.	Reform UK	Row percent
Preferred party	Labour	–	46.80	30.59	9.67	12.92	100
	Greens	37.05	–	42.77	9.36	10.80	100
	Lib Dems	35.43	37.63	–	18.02	8.87	100
	Con	10.43	17.27	20.02	–	52.26	100
	Reform UK	6.73	15.07	5.90	72.27	–	100

The Political Quarterly, Vol. 96, No. 1

Below are details of what the excluded ties are, as a percentage of all two-way ties in preferences:

		Party 2				
		Labour	Greens	Lib Dems	Cons.	Reform UK
Party 1	Labour	–	–	–	–	–
	Greens	19.3	–	–	–	–
	Lib Dems	17.5	12.6	–	–	–
	Con	7.22	4.41	5.76	–	–
	Reform UK	3.80	5.28	1.93	22.2	–

In this sample, there are also 1131 three-way ties, which is approximately 20 per cent of all ties.

A.2 Expectation of local contest, England only

This variable indicates which sort of local race respondents thought they lived in. This is created using the BESIP's 'winConstituency [party]' variables which are 0–100 scores of the perceived likelihood of each party winning.

Type of local race (perceived)	*N*	Valid per cent (%)	Percentage of all respondents in England (%)
Conservatives vs. Labour	7747	38.6	57.6
Labour vs. Liberal Democrats	3306	16.5	24.6
Labour vs. Reform	2806	14.0	20.9
Conservatives vs. Liberal Democrats	2297	11.4	17.1
Labour vs. Greens	1470	7.3	10.9
Conservatives vs. Reform	1172	5.8	8.7
Liberal Democrats vs. Reform	358	1.7	2.7
Conservatives vs. Greens	346	1.7	2.6
Liberal Democrats vs. Greens	319	1.5	2.4
Greens vs. Reform	260	1.3	1.9
Three-way race	86	–	0.6
N/A	296	–	2.2

The difference between perceptions and 'actual' local races were also reviewed (classified based on the 2024 election outcome in each constituency).

Type of local race	% thinking they lived in this type of race	% actually living in this type of race	% within each type of race that were correct
Conservatives vs. Labour	38.6	58.5	71.9
Labour vs. Liberal Democrats	16.5	1.3	3.42
Labour vs. Reform	14.0	14.6	30.0
Conservatives vs. Liberal Democrats	11.4	15.7	63.5
Labour vs. Greens	7.3	7.6	28.2
Conservatives vs. Reform	5.8	1.9	9.76
Liberal Democrats vs. Reform	1.7	0	0
Conservatives vs. Greens	1.7	0.3	7.47
Liberal Democrats vs. Greens	1.5	0	0
Greens vs. Reform	1.3	0	0
Three-way race	–	–	–
N/A	–	–	–

Appendix 2

Vote flows between 2019 and 2024

These are the values for the alluvial diagram in Figure 3.

	2024 general election vote							
	Con	Lab	LD	SNP	Plaid	Green	Ref	Other
Con	4594	892	519	18	13	164	2320	223
Labour	161	4771	579	45	37	736	194	247
LD	296	755	1137	5	6	127	55	47
SNP	3	23	8	54	0	4	4	2
Plaid	7	133	31	1	445	24	15	17
Greens	31	210	116	7	13	267	55	33
Brexit	59	50	13	4	1	15	248	26
Other	44	91	76	6	0	30	96	65

Appendix 3

tactical voting models with type of race

C.1 Figures 6 and 9: Voting for preferred parties in different types of races

Binomial model		
Outcome	Respondent voting for their preferred party	1 = the respondent voting for their preferred party 0 = the respondent either voting for another party or not voting NA = did not vote / did not report how they voted
Predictor 1	Preferred party	Categorical = all main parties in England Labour, Greens, Liberal Democrats, Conservatives, Reform UK
Predictor 2	Type of local race	Categorical = all races with > 5% N Conservatives vs. Labour, Labour vs. Lib Dems, Labour vs. Reform, Conservatives vs. Liberal Democrats, Labour vs. Greens, Conservatives vs. Reform
Interaction	Predictors 1* 2 = preferred party by type of local race	
Sample	England only	

C.2 Outcome: voting for preferred party (sample = all voters in England)

term	estimate	Std. error	p. value	Conf. low	Conf. high
(Intercept)	2.27	0.40	0.00	1.57	3.15
Race = Conservatives vs. Labour	-0.37	0.40	0.36	-1.25	0.35
Race = Conservatives vs. Lib Dems	-0.46	0.41	0.27	-1.36	0.29
Race = Conservatives vs. Reform	-0.34	0.44	0.43	-1.28	0.46
Race = Greens vs. Reform	-1.25	0.56	0.02	-2.38	-0.17
Race = Labour vs. Greens	-1.50	0.47	0.00	-2.49	-0.62
Race = Labour vs. Lib Dems	-1.08	0.43	0.01	-2.00	-0.30
Race = Labour vs. Reform	-0.85	0.43	0.05	-1.78	-0.06
Race = Lib Dems vs. Greens	0.03	0.72	0.97	-1.32	1.61
Race = Lib Dems vs. Reform	-1.33	0.60	0.03	-2.52	-0.15
Pref = Greens	-2.34	0.47	0.00	-3.33	-1.46
Pref = Labour	-1.07	0.61	0.08	-2.28	0.16
Pref = Liberal Democrats	-2.61	0.71	0.00	-4.07	-1.25
Pref = Reform	-1.31	0.57	0.02	-2.46	-0.18
Conservatives vs. Labour * Pref = Greens	-0.37	0.48	0.45	-1.27	0.65
Conservatives vs. Liberal Democrats * Pref = Greens	-0.66	0.50	0.19	-1.60	0.39
Conservatives vs. Reform * Pref = Greens	-0.32	0.56	0.56	-1.39	0.82
Greens vs. Reform * Pref = Greens	0.04	0.79	0.96	-1.56	1.58
Labour vs. Greens * Pref = Greens	1.65	0.55	0.00	0.61	2.77
Labour vs. Liberal Democrats * Pref = Greens	0.53	0.51	0.29	-0.42	1.59
Labour vs. Reform * Pref = Greens	0.32	0.52	0.54	-0.67	1.40
Liberal Democrats vs. Greens * Pref = Greens	-0.50	0.82	0.54	-2.23	1.05
Liberal Democrats vs. Reform * Pref = Greens	0.77	0.78	0.33	-0.79	2.30
Conservatives vs. Labour * Pref = Labour	1.74	0.63	0.01	0.48	2.97
Conservatives vs. Liberal Democrats * Pref = Labour	-0.56	0.63	0.38	-1.83	0.69
Conservatives vs. Reform * Pref = Labour	0.75	0.71	0.29	-0.65	2.15
Greens vs. Reform * Pref = Labour	1.92	0.90	0.03	0.17	3.75
Labour vs. Greens * Pref = Labour	2.68	0.69	0.00	1.30	4.04
Labour vs. Liberal Democrats * Pref = Labour	2.23	0.64	0.00	0.94	3.50
Labour vs. Reform * Pref = Labour	2.12	0.66	0.00	0.80	3.43
Liberal Democrats vs. Greens * Pref = Labour	0.79	0.95	0.40	-1.17	2.61
Liberal Democrats vs. Reform * Pref = Labour	2.17	0.92	0.02	0.37	4.04

(Continues)

The Political Quarterly, Vol. 96, No. 1

term	estimate	Std. error	p. value	Conf. low	Conf. high
Conservatives vs. Labour * Pref = Liberal Democrats	0.53	0.72	0.46	-0.84	2.01
Conservatives vs. Liberal Democrats * Pref = Liberal Democrats	2.58	0.73	0.00	1.17	4.08
Conservatives vs. Reform * Pref = Liberal Democrats	0.28	0.82	0.74	-1.31	1.93
Greens vs. Reform * Pref = Liberal Democrats	2.84	1.14	0.01	0.70	5.26
Labour vs. Greens * Pref = Liberal Democrats	2.13	0.81	0.01	0.58	3.77
Labour vs. Liberal Democrats * Pref = Liberal Democrats	1.97	0.73	0.01	0.56	3.47
Labour vs. Reform * Pref = Liberal Democrats	1.52	0.76	0.05	0.05	3.08
Liberal Democrats vs. Greens * Pref = Liberal Democrats	1.34	1.07	0.21	-0.81	3.44
Liberal Democrats vs. Reform * Pref = Liberal Democrats	2.76	0.98	0.00	0.86	4.74
Conservatives vs. Labour * Pref = Reform UK	0.14	0.58	0.81	-1.01	1.32
Conservatives vs. Liberal Democrats * Pref = Reform UK	0.30	0.60	0.62	-0.88	1.50
Conservatives vs. Reform * Pref = Reform UK	0.59	0.61	0.33	-0.61	1.82
Greens vs. Reform * Pref = Reform UK	1.39	0.77	0.07	-0.13	2.91
Labour vs. Greens * Pref = Reform UK	1.53	0.68	0.02	0.19	2.88
Labour vs. Liberal Democrats * Pref = Reform UK	0.95	0.62	0.12	-0.25	2.19
Labour vs. Reform * Pref = Reform UK	1.71	0.61	0.00	0.52	2.93
Liberal Democrats vs. Greens * Pref = Reform UK	0.65	0.95	0.49	-1.30	2.48
Liberal Democrats vs. Reform * Pref = Reform UK	1.67	0.77	0.03	0.15	3.17

Appendix 4

tactical voting models with type and closeness of race

D.1 Figure 5a: probability of Lib Dem preferers voting Labour by type and closeness of race

General additive model (GAM)		
Outcome	Respondent voting Labour	1 = the respondent voting Labour 0 = the respondent voting for another party NA = did not vote / did not report how they voted
Predictor 1	Type of local race	Categorical = all races with > 5% N Conservatives vs. Labour, Labour vs. Lib Dems, Labour vs. Reform, Conservatives vs. Liberal Democrats, Labour vs. Greens, Conservatives vs. Reform
Predictor 2	Closeness of race *This is the smooth term in the GAM*	Continuous = -50 to 50. Calculated as the perceived probability of one of the two frontrunners winning subtracted to the other. 0 indicates that the two parties are seen as having an equal chance of winning in the constituency.
Interaction	Predictors 1* 2 = type of local race and closeness of race	
Sample	England only; only respondents with Lib Dems as preferred party	

D.2 Outcome: voting for Labour (sample = Liberal Democrat preferers in England)

term	edf	ref.df	statistic	p. value
Race closeness * Race = Conservatives vs. Labour	7.55	8.16	13.61	0.09
Race closeness * Race = Conservatives vs. Lib Dems	5.80	6.89	26.17	0.00
Race closeness * Race = Labour vs. Greens	1.48	1.81	1.98	0.44
Race closeness * Race = Labour vs. Liberal Democrats	4.04	4.98	66.45	0.00
Race closeness * Race = Labour vs. Reform	1.00	1.00	0.13	0.71

The Political Quarterly, Vol. 96, No. 1

D.3 Figure 5b: probability of Labour preferers voting Lib Dem by type and closeness of race

General additive model (GAM)		
Outcome	Respondent voting for the Liberal Democrats	1 = the respondent voting for the Liberal Democrats 0 = the respondent voting for another party or not voting NA = did not vote / did not report how they voted
Predictor 1	Type of local race	Categorical = all races with > 5% N Conservatives vs. Labour, Labour vs. Lib Dems, Labour vs. Reform, Conservatives vs. Liberal Democrats, Labour vs. Greens, Conservatives vs. Reform
Predictor 2	Closeness of race *This is the smooth term in the GAM*	Continuous = -50 to 50. Calculated as the perceived probability of one of the two frontrunners winning subtracted to the other. 0 indicates that the two parties are seen as having an equal chance of winning in the constituency.
Interaction	Predictors 1* 2 = type of local race and closeness of race	
Sample	England only; only respondents with Labour as preferred party	

D.4 Outcome: voting for the Liberal Democrats (sample = Labour preferers in England)

term	edf	ref.df	statistic	p. value
Race closeness * Race = Conservatives vs. Labour	2.24	2.85	6.30	0.10
Race closeness * Race = Conservatives vs. Lib Dems	2.19	2.79	18.63	0.00
Race closeness * Race = Labour vs. Greens	1.87	2.34	2.89	0.26
Race closeness * Race = Labour vs. Liberal Democrats	1.00	1.00	23.76	0.00
Race closeness * Race = Labour vs. Reform	1.94	2.45	2.84	0.34

D.5 Figure 5c: probability of Greens preferers voting Green by type and closeness of race

General additive model (GAM)		
Outcome	Respondent voting for the Greens	1 = the respondent voting for the Greens 0 = the respondent voting for another party or not voting NA = did not vote / did not report how they voted
Predictor 1	Type of local race	Categorical = all races with > 5% N Conservatives vs. Labour, Labour vs. Lib Dems, Labour vs. Reform, Conservatives vs. Liberal Democrats, Labour vs. Greens, Conservatives vs. Reform
Predictor 2	Closeness of race *This is the smooth term in the GAM*	Continuous = -50 to 50. Calculated as the perceived probability of one of the two frontrunners winning subtracted to the other. 0 indicates that the two parties are seen as having an equal chance of winning in the constituency.
Interaction	Predictors 1* 2 = type of local race and closeness of race	
Sample	England only; only respondents with the Greens as preferred party	

term	edf	ref.df	statistic	p. value
Race closeness * Race = Conservatives vs. Labour	1.85	2.35	13.92	0.00
Race closeness * Race = Conservatives vs. Lib Dems	1.00	1.00	6.34	0.01
Race closeness * Race = Labour vs. Greens	3.10	3.87	20.71	0.00
Race closeness * Race = Labour vs. Liberal Democrats	1.00	1.00	6.77	0.01
Race closeness * Race = Labour vs. Reform	1.00	1.00	0.16	0.69

D.6 Figure 7, left-hand and middle panels: probability of Reform preferers voting Conservative by type and closeness of race

General additive model (GAM)		
Outcome	Respondent voting Conservative	1 = the respondent voting Conservative 0 = the respondent voting for another party or not voting NA = did not vote / did not report how they voted
Predictor 1	Type of local race	Categorical = all races with > 5% N Conservatives vs. Labour, Labour vs. Lib Dems, Labour vs. Reform, Conservatives vs. Liberal Democrats, Labour vs. Greens, Conservatives vs. Reform
Predictor 2	Closeness of race *This is the smooth term in the GAM*	Continuous = -50 to 50. Calculated as the perceived probability of one of the two frontrunners winning subtracted to the other. 0 indicates that the two parties are seen as having an equal chance of winning in the constituency.
Interaction	Predictors 1* 2 = type of local race and closeness of race	
Sample	England only; only respondents with Reform as preferred party	

The Political Quarterly, Vol. 96, No. 1

D.7 Outcome: voting for the Conservatives (sample = Reform preferers in England)

term	edf	ref.df	statistic	p. value
Race closeness * Race = Conservatives vs. Labour	2.30	2.93	7.11	0.07
Race closeness * Race = Conservatives vs. Lib Dems	1.00	1.00	1.93	0.16
Race closeness * Race = Labour vs. Greens	1.00	1.00	0.02	0.89
Race closeness * Race = Labour vs. Liberal Democrats	1.00	1.00	0.00	0.99
Race closeness * Race = Labour vs. Reform	4.98	5.88	12.03	0.06

D.8 Figure 7, right-hand panel: probability of Reform preferers voting Conservative by type and closeness of race

General additive model (GAM)		
Outcome	Respondent voting Reform	1 = the respondent voting Reform 0 = the respondent voting for another party or not voting NA = did not vote / did not report how they voted
Predictor 1	Type of local race	Categorical = all races with > 5% N Conservatives vs. Labour, Labour vs. Lib Dems, Labour vs. Reform, Conservatives vs. Liberal Democrats, Labour vs. Greens, Conservatives vs. Reform
Predictor 2	Closeness of race *This is the smooth term in the GAM*	Continuous = -50 to 50. Calculated as the perceived probability of one of the two frontrunners winning subtracted to the other. 0 indicates that the two parties are seen as having an equal chance of winning in the constituency.
Interaction	Predictors 1* 2 = type of local race and closeness of race	
Sample	England only; only respondents with the Conservatives as preferred party	

D.9 Outcome: voting for Reform (sample = Conservative preferers in England)

term	edf	ref.df	statistic	p. value
Race closeness * Race = Conservatives vs. Labour	3.23	4.01	7.45	0.11
Race closeness * Race = Conservatives vs. Lib Dems	1.28	1.51	0.50	0.78
Race closeness * Race = Labour vs. Greens	1.00	1.00	0.84	0.36
Race closeness * Race = Labour vs. Liberal Democrats	1.39	1.68	0.32	0.73
Race closeness * Race = Labour vs. Reform	1.00	1.00	2.34	0.13

Appendix 5

full Scotland models with controls

Binomial models		
Outcome	Respondent voting Labour	1 = the respondent voting Conservative 0 = the respondent voting for another party or not voting NA = did not vote / did not report how they voted
Predictors in model 1	Government approval categories	Categorical = all races with > 5% N Conservatives vs. Labour, Labour vs. Lib Dems, Labour vs. Reform, Conservatives vs. Liberal Democrats, Labour vs. Greens, Conservatives vs. Reform
Predictors in model 2	Independence, Brexit, Party identity	Continuous = -50 to 50. Calculated as the perceived probability of one of the two frontrunners winning subtracted to the other. 0 indicates that the two parties are seen as having an equal chance of winning in the constituency.
Predictors in model 3	Demographic controls	Age, education, gender, income
Sample	Scotland only	

E.1. Outcome: voting Labour (sample = Scottish respondents)

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
	Government approval only	With demographics	Demographics + constitutional preferences
Govt approval *(ref: both govts good)*	**-1.06 ***	**-1.08 ***	-0.19
UK govt bad only	(0.51)	(0.51)	(0.59)
Scottish govt bad only	-0.50	-0.43	-0.36
	(0.53)	(0.54)	(0.61)
Both govts performed badly	**1.01 ***	**1.00 ***	0.85
	(0.49)	(0.49)	(0.55)
Support for independence	–	–	**-2.04 ****
Yes			(0.24)
Support for Brexit	–	–	**-1.39 ****
Leave			(0.19)
Age	–	-0.00	**-0.01 ***
		(0.00)	(0.00)
Education *(ref: below A-levels)*	–	-0.04	-0.05
A-levels/college diploma		(0.21)	(0.23)
Professional qualification	–	0.12	-0.11
		(0.24)	(0.26)
University	–	0.03	-0.12
		(0.18)	(0.20)
Gender	–	**0.45 ***	**0.32 ***
Women		(0.14)	(0.15)

The Political Quarterly, Vol. 96, No. 1