



By: TA | AP Insight

The decline of traditional parties – Britain enters uncharted political territory



British Prime Minister Keir Starmer pledged to revive his struggling government but faced growing calls Saturday to resign after a disastrous set of **local and regional elections** for his Labour Party.

As the final results came in Saturday, Labour suffered a net loss of more than 1,100 local council seats across England, lost control of several local authorities it had held for decades and was booted from power in Wales after 27 years.

Anti-immigration party Reform UK gained over 1,300 seats across England and made significant gains in legislative elections in Wales and Scotland.

It was a blunt verdict from voters in elections widely seen as an **unofficial referendum** on Starmer, whose popularity has plummeted since he led the center-left party to power less than two years ago.

Starmer is on borrowed time

Starmer insisted he would not walk away and "plunge the country into chaos."

"The right thing to do is rebuild and show the path forward," Starmer said Saturday. "That's what I'm going to do in the coming days."

Starmer's Cabinet colleagues expressed support, and none of the high-profile Labour politicians considered potential challengers made a move against him.

Health Secretary **Wes Streeting**, former Deputy Prime Minister Angela Rayner and Greater Manchester Mayor Andy Burnham have kept quiet so far.

But a growing number of Labour lawmakers urged the prime minister to set a timetable for his departure this year.

Starmer is due to make a speech on Monday in an attempt to regain momentum

British politics allows parties to change leader midterm without the need for a new election.

"There has to be a timetable," legislator Clive Betts told the BBC. Another lawmaker, Tony Vaughan, said there should be an "orderly transition of leadership."

Labour lawmaker Catherine West said she would try to run for party leader if the Cabinet did not remove Starmer by Monday — though she acknowledged she had nowhere near the support of 81 colleagues needed to force a contest.

Starmer tried to demonstrate change on Saturday by bringing back two figures from past Labour governments.

He made former Prime Minister Gordon Brown a special envoy on global finance, and appointed the party's ex-deputy leader Harriet Harman an adviser on women and girls.

Starmer is due to make a speech on Monday in an attempt to regain momentum, before the government sets out its legislative plans on Wednesday in a speech delivered by King Charles III at the State Opening of Parliament.

Reform UK is on the rise

The elections were a breakthrough for **Reform UK**, the latest hard-right party led by the veteran nationalist politician Nigel Farage.

Running on an anti-establishment and anti-immigration message, the party won hundreds of local council seats in working-class areas in England's north, such as Sunderland, that were solid Labour turf for decades.

It also made gains from the Conservatives in areas like the county of Essex, east of London, and increased its vote share in Wales and Scotland, new terrain for the party.

The results marked a historic change in British politics - Nigel Farage

Farage said the results marked a “historic change in British politics.” He said he’s confident that “voters who have come to us are not doing it as a short-term protest.”

Reform UK currently holds just eight of the 650 seats in the House of Commons and it’s unclear whether it could repeat its success in a national election.

An increasingly disunited kingdom

The elections produced semiautonomous administrations in Scotland and Wales led by parties devoted to independence and the breakup of the United Kingdom — though neither has that policy on the front burner.

The Scottish National Party, which has governed in Edinburgh since 2007, won another term but fell short of a majority, meaning an independence referendum is unlikely. Labour and Reform tied in a distant second place.

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Plaid Cymru (The Party of Wales) won the most seats in the Cardiff-based legislature, the Senedd. The party, which has an ambition for Wales to leave the U.K. but no plan to do so anytime soon, fell short of a majority but will likely form the new government.

Reform came second and Labour a distant third in one of its most historic heartlands, with outgoing First Minister Eluned Morgan losing her seat.

The economy is the biggest problem

The economy lies at the heart of Labour’s troubles, as it does for many incumbent

governments.

Since ending 14 years of Conservative rule roiled by austerity and the COVID-19 pandemic, Labour has struggled to ease the cost of living and jump-start a sluggish economy against the tough economic backdrop of war in Ukraine and, more recently, Iran.

Starmer also has angered supporters with attempts to cut welfare spending, some of which were reversed after Labour revolts.

Some in Labour say the government’s achievements, including protections for renters and a higher minimum wage, are going unnoticed.

Many blame Starmer, an uninspiring leader distracted by scandals including his disastrous decision to appoint **Peter Mandelson**, a scandal-tarnished friend of Jeffrey Epstein, as Britain’s ambassador to Washington.

But Stephen Houghton, the outgoing leader of Barnsley council in northern England, where Labour lost to Reform, said the problem “goes deeper than the prime minister.”

“This has been coming for 30 years around the country, in post-industrial communities, coastal communities, that have been left behind,” he said. “You can change prime ministers all day long. If you don’t change policy, it’s not going to change.”

The two-party political system is fracturing

The results reflect a fragmentation of U.K. politics after decades of domination by Labour and the Conservative Party, which also suffered major losses on Thursday.

The elections offered voters a rainbow of choices, including the centrist Liberal Democrats and the nationalist parties in Scotland and Wales.



The big winners were populist insurgents, Reform UK and the Green Party - Nigel Farage

But the big winners were populist insurgents, Reform UK and the **Green Party**, whose focus has expanded from the environment to social justice and the Palestinian cause under self-described “eco populist” leader Zack Polanski.

The Greens won hundreds of council seats from Labour in urban centers and university towns and took control of several local authorities.

Tony Travers, professor of government at the London School of Economics, said the results suggest the next national election, due by 2029, won't produce a majority for any party.

“So then you're in the world of, after the election, two or three big minority parties trying to work out how they would govern,” he said — something traditionally considered “very un-British.”