

**FABIAN  
SOCIETY**

# **UNEVEN GROUND**

HOW TO REBUILD LABOUR'S ELECTORAL  
COALITION

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# Acknowledgements

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# About the author

James Prentice is a researcher and writer specialising in electoral trends in British politics. He studied electoral behaviour at the University of Essex and completed a PhD in British electoral research at the University of Sussex. He joined Labour in 2011 and serves as secretary of the Hastings & Rother Fabian Society. His research focuses on understanding Labour's electoral challenges and developing strategies to address them.

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# 1. INTRODUCTION

Following a landslide victory in the 2024 general election, it appeared that Labour had overcome the electoral dysfunction that plagued it during the 2010s. Despite a devastating defeat to the Tories just five years earlier, Labour secured an astounding 411 seats, giving the party a majority of nearly 150.

To secure this victory, the party more effectively targeted specific voter groups within key seats. This overcame the party's historic tendency to increase its vote share in seats it already held while narrowly missing out on the constituencies it needed to secure to win power. Indeed, the party's vote share was so efficient Labour that secured its majority on only 34 per cent of the vote.

Of course, the failures of Labour's opponents were at least as important. The rise of Reform in many Conservative-held seats split the right-wing vote, and in Scotland, years of scandal and ineptitude saw the SNP at their lowest ebb in decades.

It was nevertheless a remarkable turnaround. Yet, if the polling is to be believed, Labour now finds itself, at best, in distant place to Nigel Farage's Reform. The rise of Reform is the new electoral challenge Labour must face – and from a weak position: Labour's first year in government has proven tricky, and its coalition of voters obtained in 2024 has splintered. In other words, Labour's electoral problems have returned.

## Purpose and method

The purpose of this pamphlet is to explain why Labour in government has so far been unable to unite the voters it won in 2024. It will do this by using the British Election Study (BES) to isolate individuals who voted Labour in 2024 and identify who they would support if a general election were called in the Summer of 2025. The analysis of these voters uses weights to ensure it is representative of the country's population. Its core purpose is to explore these voters' opinions in order to

understand why voters are abandoning Labour for each respective party. This will allow the identification of Labour's optimal electoral strategy to beat Reform, providing Labour with a clear direction to take for the rest of this parliament.

This pamphlet argues Labour has lost support due to a perceived inability to deliver on lost voters' core concerns. As these concerns often relate to the economy, lost economic credibility is key to explaining losses. Additionally, a focus on hardline immigration rhetoric, and the weakening of the Labour party brand, has contributed to a loss of support.

I also argue that the optimal strategy to beat Reform is to target voters lost to the Lib Dems, Greens and those who are now 'undecided'. Currently, liberal voters are highly fragmented, but they have common concerns and priorities. They prioritise improving the economy and public services, and disagree with the negative viewpoints on immigration.

This pamphlet asserts that by uniting these disparate voters, Labour can secure greater support than in 2024 and beat Reform. In a highly fragmented multi-party system, Reform can be beaten by amassing voters they can't reach rather than by taking votes directly from them. Labour has lost many of these voters to the Greens and Lib Dems, both in this parliament and the previous one. Targeting these liberal voters can provide enough support to beat Reform, who repel liberal voters. Such a strategy would also avoid the pitfall of pursuing a relatively small group of voters lost to Reform, who will be much harder to retain.

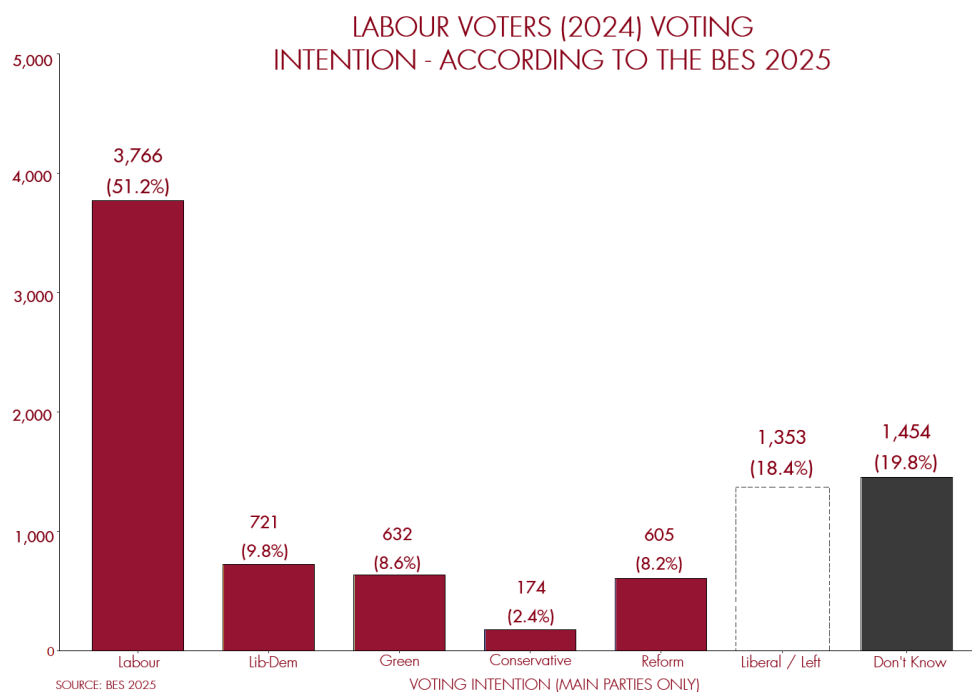
## 2. LABOUR'S 2024 VOTER COALITION

Labour has retained 51 per cent of all individuals who voted for Labour in the 2024 general election (4.95 million people). The biggest loss of support is accounted for people who now do not know how they will vote in a future national election. Figure 1 demonstrates that 1 in 5 2024 Labour voters now say they are unsure who to support, 6.7 per cent of all voters (1.92m people).

The next biggest group of losses has been to left or liberal parties, 18.4 per cent of Labour's 2024 coalition. This equates to 1.79 million individuals – 6.2 per cent of all those who voted in 2024. The Lib Dems have taken slightly more than the Greens (9.8 per cent vs 8.6 per cent), but both have accrued over 835,000 voters each from Labour. In contrast, Reform has taken 8.2 per cent of Labour's 2024 voter base, 796,000 people. Crucially, this only represents 2.8 per cent of everybody who voted in the last election, and is less than half the number lost to liberal-left parties and those currently undecided. Losses to the Conservatives are also relatively small, with 2.8 per cent of Labour's 2024 vote flowing to the Tories.

The trend of Labour losing voters disproportionately to left-liberal parties is a continuation of a trend that developed in the last parliament. Just under 20 per cent of Labour's 2019 vote switched to the Greens (11 per cent) and the Lib-Dems (8.6 per cent) by the time of the 2024 election. Reform losses only comprised 2.4 per cent of Labour's 2019 support base. Therefore, while working-class losses from Labour to the radical right may generate a good deal of media attention, it is important to remember that for a long time, Labour's main losses have been to left-of-centre parties.

**FIGURE 1: VOTING INTENTION OF THOSE WHO VOTED LABOUR IN 2024**



Source: BES 2025

The first sign that this is the case can be found in the demographic composition of these voters (see Figure 2). Labour to Reform switchers tend to be white, older people who are more likely to be on a low income, live in socially rented accommodation, and belong to ‘social grades’ D or E. They are less likely to have gone to university or own their own home. In contrast, Labour to Green switchers tend to be young and university-educated, although like those who have moved to Reform, they are less likely to own their own home than average. The Lib Dems switchers are older than the Greens, and tend to have higher incomes and larger levels of home ownership. This supports both More in Common and Persuasion UK data that shows Labour is losing support across a wide range of income groupings.

While there are some differences between Green and Lib Dem losses, as a group, Lib Dem and Green losses are younger, more ethnically diverse and have received more education than losses to Reform. They are also more likely to work in professional (AB) occupations (see Figure 2). The losses Labour experienced from 2019 onwards followed the same patterns, with losses to the Greens in the 2024 election coming from younger, more highly educated groupings, whilst those who

switched to Reform tended to be older individuals with fewer qualifications. Again, these differences between these two groups of lost Labour support are confirmed by More in Common and Persuasion UK research.

**FIGURE 2: DEMOGRAPHIC COMPOSITION OF VOTERS LABOUR HAS LOST TO VARIOUS PARTIES SINCE 2024**

Category	Age	Uni Educated	Home Own	Rent Social	Income High	Income Low	White	AB	DE
Loyal Labour	38	67.0%	66.3%	17.9%	37.9%	21.2%	81.4%	35.3%	15.3%
Lib-Dem	38	63.2%	61.1%	20.9%	37.1%	27.0%	85.3%	32.7%	20.1%
Green	32	68.8%	53.2%	24.4%	34.5%	26.7%	83.3%	32.4%	19.9%
Conservative	42	56.1%	68.6%	15.4%	32.8%	21.8%	74.6%	31.8%	17.9%
Reform	42	30.5%	55.8%	29.5%	21.0%	37.6%	90.4%	19.1%	30.9%
Don't Know	39	52.7%	64.9%	19.2%	26.1%	25.7%	83.9%	26.3%	22.3%

Source: BES 2025

The contrasting demography of voters lost to left-of-centre vs right-wing parties also highlights a 'value divide'. The BES records the overall ideological position of a voter both on the left/right and liberal/authoritarian dimension, both on a 0-20 scale. On average, all Labour's losses scored below 10 on the first axis, indicating a left-wing score. Yet, the key difference occurred on the libertarian-authoritarian scale. The Lib-Dems and Greens have mostly gained voters who are liberal (scoring below 10), with those on the left turning to the Greens and those in the centre moving to the Lib Dems. Reform and the Conservatives, on the other hand, have received left-authoritarians who backed Labour in 2024. Importantly, these trends also mirrored the losses Labour experienced from those who supported Labour in 2019. The only noticeable difference was that in 2024 there was a slightly stronger trend in left-liberals moving to the Greens and right-authoritarians switching to Reform. The contrasting overall ideological positions of these voters demonstrate that Labour has been losing different voters for contrasting reasons over successive years.

# 3. WHAT ARE VOTERS CONCERNS AND PRIORITIES?

## Their priorities

The voters Labour has retained and those it has lost both view the economy as the number one issue the country should address – except those who have switched to Reform, who, cite immigration. Sixty-four per cent of those who have stayed with Labour, are currently undecided, or have switched to the Lib Dems, the Conservatives or the Green party state that the economy should be this government's focus. While it is unlikely any voter coalition from 2024 will have a consistent set of economic policies they favour, they can likely all agree that the government should be prioritising increasing economic growth, tackling rising unemployment and improving the cost of living. A further 30 per cent of those who have switched to Reform also prioritise the economy.

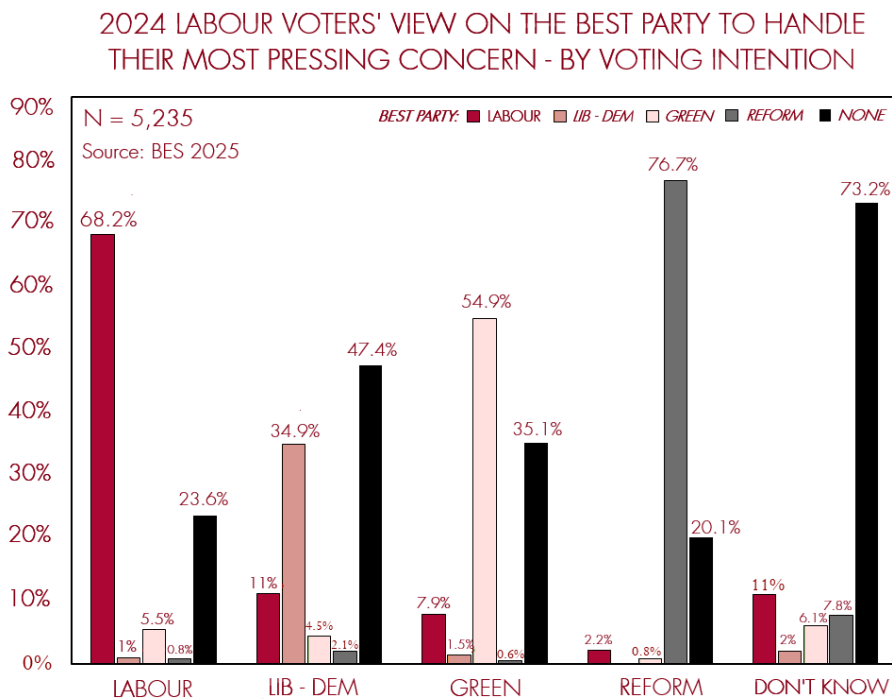
Crucially, these priorities follow very similar patterns to those we saw in the 2019-2024 parliament. A majority (54 per cent) of losses to the Lib Dems and Greens during this period stated the economy to be their core concern, although Greens were also likely to cite the environment as their biggest priority. Again, losses to Reform were different, with a majority of this group (60 per cent) stating that immigration was their top concern. Once more, this suggests Labour's problems are an extension of the electoral challenges they experienced in the previous parliament.

## Their Concerns

Concerns around competence on voters' most salient issues are the primary reason voters are leaving Labour – as opposed to, for example, the popularity of the leader. Figure 3 shows that a majority of voters Labour has retained believe that the government is handling their most

pressing concern better than any other party could (68 per cent). A further 23 per cent feel that no party could deliver on their core concerns. Few of those who have ceased to support the party feel Labour is the party that can deliver on their most immediate concerns. Amongst those who have switched to the Greens, 54 per cent believe the Greens can perform better on their key priorities, which are mostly related to the economy or the environment. Since 47 per cent of the losses Labour experienced to the Greens in the 2019-2024 parliament also felt this way, this can be seen as a long-term challenge for Labour.

**FIGURE 3: LABOUR VOTERS VIEW ON THE PARTY THAT CAN BEST MANAGE THEIR PRIMARY CONCERN**



Source 3: BES 2025

Others are less hopeful, as documented by Persuasion UK research, according to which 70 per cent of former Labour voters who are now undecided, 46 per cent of those who have moved to the Lib Dems, and 34 per cent of Green switchers say no party is offering solutions to their most pressing concerns. Further, only 34 per cent of those moving to the Lib Dems believe the party to be the best to manage economic affairs. This suggests many voters are moving due to economic dissatisfaction rather than embracing a different party's policies. This may reflect disappointment on salient government policies, such as the handling of the budget, changes to winter fuel payments, reforms to

welfare and unplanned changes to tax. Vitaly, research from YouGov demonstrate how these unpopular government policies have had a larger impact with the electorate than the government's achievements. Further, More in Common's research reflects how dissatisfaction with mainstream parties' performance is increasing support for smaller parties.

Reform voters are the exception, with a clear majority (77 per cent) believing Reform can deliver on their core issue – potentially making these voters much harder to win back. Ninety-two per cent of the time, this judgement was made in relation to immigration (62 per cent) or the economy (30 per cent). There was also a large proportion (65 per cent) of those lost to Reform in the previous parliament who believed Reform was best to manage their core concern, again most often stated to be immigration. This highlights that Reform voters may have left not just due to dissatisfaction with the government, but due to a belief that another party can deliver on their core concern. Again, this means they will be very hard to win back.

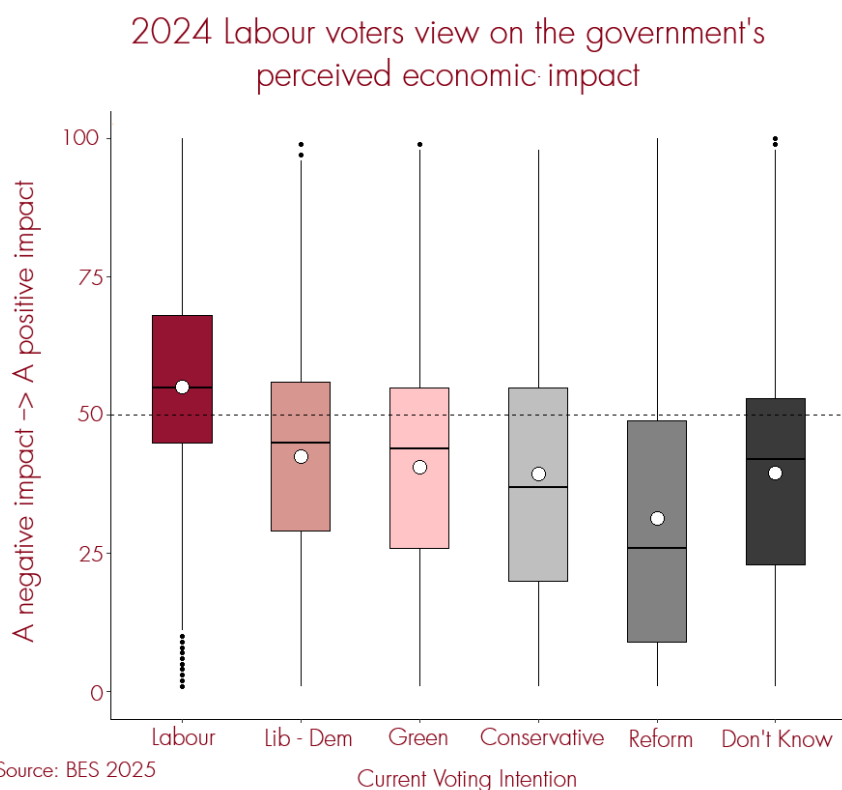
## 4. PUBLIC PERCEPTION OF THE ECONOMY AND PUBLIC SERVICES

The argument that 2024 Labour voters' concerns about the government's ability to manage the economy is lowering support for Labour is confirmed in multiple questions in the 2025 BES dataset. Figure 4 outlines that a clear majority of individuals who have left Labour in its first year of government perceived the new administration to have negatively impacted the economy. This includes roughly two-thirds of those who have switched to the Lib Dems, Greens, Conservatives, or are currently undecided, feeling the Labour government has weakened the economy. This also includes 75 per cent of Reform switchers. Again, this shows how hardened these voters have become against the Labour government. In contrast, more than half of those who have stayed with Labour perceived the new administration as having improved economic performance, and 37 per cent believed they had done a good job in the day-to-day running of the economy.

Vitaly, this suggests that to retain power, the government needs to convince voters they can handle economic matters well.

One particular challenge to overcome will be the feeling that most voters' personal finances are being reduced, despite the fact that wages have begun to outstrip inflation<sup>1</sup>. Forty-seven per cent of Labour's losses to the Lib Dems and Greens felt that their local economy and household finances had worsened, with 60 per cent of Reform switchers sharing this view.

FIGURE 4: LABOUR VOTERS' VIEW ON THE GOVERNMENT'S PERCEIVED IMPACT



Source: BES 2025

As Labour had promised to deliver economic change, the lack of progress seen in the national economy and in many individuals' personal household finances may be leaving them feeling let down. Changes to tax, winter fuel cuts and proposed changes to benefits may also be leading a proportion of Labour's 2024 base to conclude that Labour can't deliver the promised change. Unsurprisingly, research from both YouGov and More in Common has highlighted how people who reacted negatively to perceived failings are less likely to feel that Labour can deliver on the economy. Specifically, proposed cuts to winter fuel payments and disability benefits were associated with a strong negative reaction. More than 50 per cent of the individuals Labour lost to all parties in the 2019-2024 parliament also felt their cost of living and their local economy had worsened, and did not perceive Labour as a party that could reverse this trend. Losses post-2024, then, represent a continuation of a commonly-held perception that Labour cannot manage the economy or tackle the cost of living.

## 5. SHOULD LABOUR CHASE REFORM VOTERS?

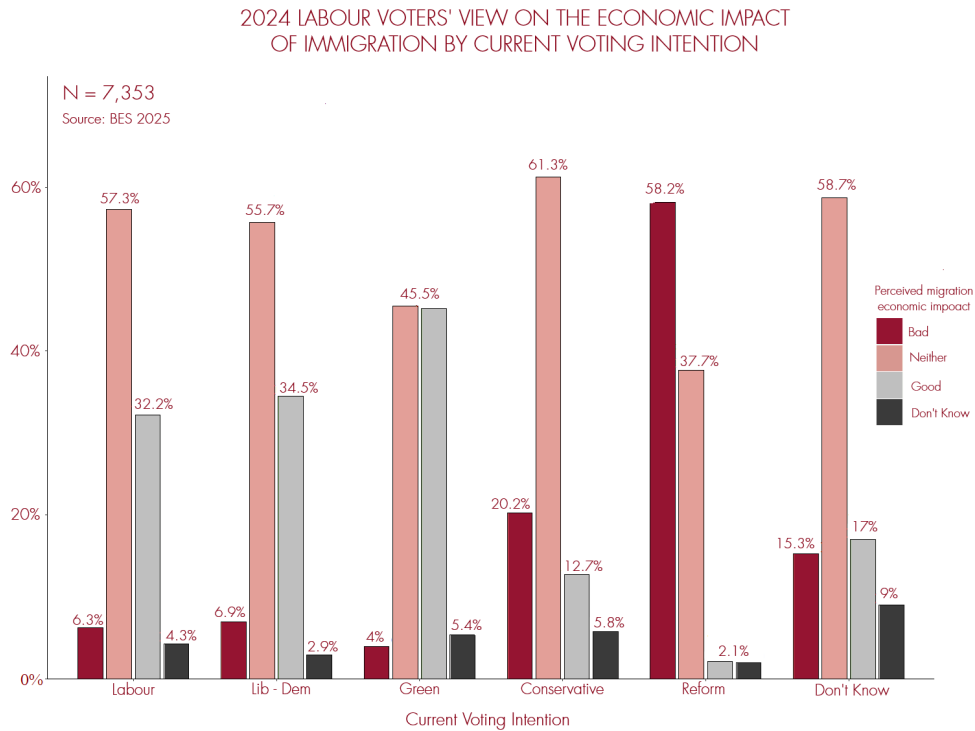
Critics of the current Labour strategy argue that the heavy emphasis on fighting Reform by tackling migration may push progressive voters to left/liberal parties. Exploration of the BES shows this threat to be real.

BES respondents are asked what they perceive different parties' immigration policies to be. Of those who have switched from Labour to Lib Dem, 10 per cent perceive Labour's policy to be to increase migration, and only 23 per cent thought Labour was aiming to reduce migration, with most seeing Labour as maintaining current levels. These voters perceived the Lib Dems' and Greens' positions to be closer to their own. For instance, 33 per cent of Green switchers indicated they would accept migration levels increasing, with 31 per cent feeling the Greens shared their position, and only 6 per cent believing Labour held this stance. Notably, a third of voters who feel comfortable with immigration increasing are disproportionately high, showing how voters Labour has lost to the Greens are disproportionately culturally liberal. Additionally, more of the voters perceived Labour as wanting to lower migration, meaning Labour was quite distant from voters lost to the Greens on this issue.

In contrast, of those lost to Reform, only 17 per cent see Labour as a party of reduced migration, while 83 per cent perceive Reform as a party that will reduce migration, which is the preference of 87 per cent of the voters lost to Reform. Consequently, despite Labour's heavy focus on talking tough on migration, they have been unable to persuade these voters. At the same time, this emphasis may have pushed more liberal voters away to the Lib Dems and Greens. Research from the University of Southampton confirms this possibility: it found Labour's language around immigration decreased support for Labour amongst progressive voters. Further, the focus on immigration doesn't appear to have helped Labour retain voters, thus preventing them from moving to Reform. Labour has only retained 25 per cent of individuals

who prioritise the immigration issue, with the other 75 per cent mostly drifting to Reform. Yet, they have been able to retain 55 per cent of those who prioritise the economy, 60 per cent of those valuing health and 54 per cent of those focusing on the environment.

**FIGURE 5: LABOUR VOTERS' VIEW ON ECONOMIC IMPACT OF IMMIGRATION**



Source: BES 2025

One explanation for why Labour has been unable to convince Reform voters to return is that these voters most often perceive immigration to be higher than the reported level. Voters who have stuck with Labour, switched to the Lib-Dems or flowed to the Greens most often perceive immigration to have stayed roughly at the level it was when Labour took office (45 per cent). Another 10 per cent think migration has decreased, with less than a third feeling it has increased. On the other hand, a clear majority of those who have moved to Reform feel that there has been a clear increase in migration (88 per cent).

Reform switchers, then, tend to prioritise immigration as an issue and believe it is increasing, and despite Labour’s focus on tackling migration – and net migration falling by 475,000 – this has not altered these voters’ perceptions. Consequently, in terms of migration policy, voters lost to Reform likely see the current government as an extension

of the previous, which allowed migration to rapidly rise. Crucially, this means that even if further reductions in migration can be achieved, there is no guarantee these voters will reward the government.

According to BES data, 34 per cent of Lib Dem switchers and 45 per cent of Green switchers believe immigration to be of an economic and cultural benefit for the country. This was significantly more than the 5 per cent who believed it to be damaging. Once more, these voters are at odds with individuals lost to Reform, where 58 per cent feel that migration negatively impacts the country, see Figure 5.

Thus far, we have treated immigration and the economy as separate issues, but they are linked. Statistical modelling demonstrates that individuals who switched to a liberal or left-leaning party were 17 per cent more likely to leave Labour when they felt positive about the economic impact of migration than those who were more sceptical. In contrast, those lost to Reform were significantly more likely to leave Labour when they believed migration to be bad for UK economic output.

In summary, chasing Reform voters on immigration will likely result in alienating the much larger left/liberal base Labour needs to retain power, whilst not guaranteeing the party will regain voters moving to Reform.

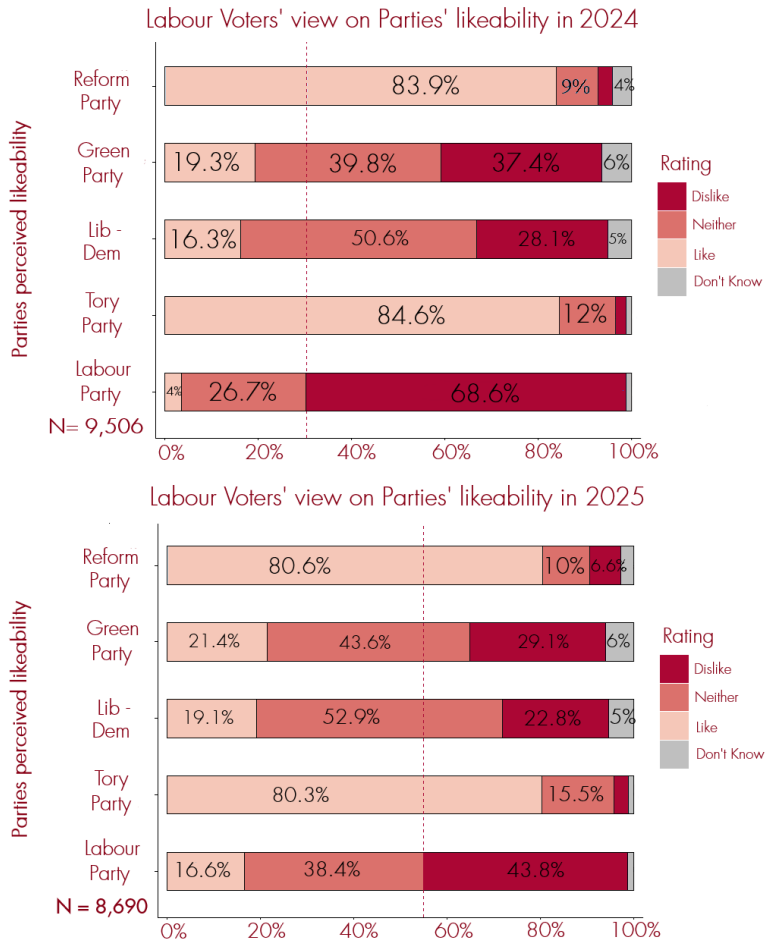
## 6. A DAMAGED LABOUR BRAND?

Another impactful factor has been the weakening of the Labour party brand. In the 2024 general election, Labour had the highest favourability rating, with 30 per cent of all voters reporting a very favourable view of the party, beating all other parties by more than 10 points. Amongst individuals who voted for Labour, very high favourability existed: 69 per cent of the voters Labour secured in 2024 had a positive rating of the Labour party brand. Yet only 44 per cent of these voters still viewed Labour positively by the 2025 local elections – a 25-point decrease (see Figure 6). Labour has also seen a 12-point increase in being *disliked* by these voters.

This would suggest that unpopular decisions, some forcing the government into U-turns, have weakened the appeal Labour had in the 2024 general election. Again, it is important to note that analysis by YouGov found that the winter fuel payment cut, welfare cuts, and tax changes are more salient and impactful than Labour's achievements. Importantly, this shows that Labour's problems extend far wider than any one individual or politician.

Research by More in Common reveals that former Labour supporters feel that the party has implemented policies that they do not associate with a Labour government. In particular, it found that the voters leaving Labour believed the party was too right-wing. This is confirmed by BES data, where 25 per cent of Labour to Green switchers and 15 per cent of Labour to Lib Dem defectors view Labour as right-wing, compared to only 5 per cent of voters who have stayed with Labour.

FIGURE 6: LABOUR VOTERS' FAVOURABILITY OF THE MAIN PARTIES IN ENGLAND IN 2024 AND 2025



Source: BES 2025

Crucially, though, Green and Lib Dem switchers do not dislike Labour as much as Reform switchers do. Thirty-two per cent of those lost to the Greens and 25 per cent of those lost to the Lib Dems now register an unfavourable view of Labour; a full 60 per cent of those who have switched to Reform do.

Only 2 per cent of voters who have stayed with Labour register an unfavourable view of the party. This may seem like a truism, but it is important, since it indicates that, so far, Labour’s anti-Reform tactical voting drive is not working. It is still possible that voters with an unfavourable view of Labour will reluctantly vote for the party at the next election – but they are showing little sign of it at the moment.

# 7. BUILDING A COALITION TO DEFEAT REFORM

As this pamphlet has outlined, a new strategy is needed – one that targets the large losses to liberal-left parties experienced both over the last year and during the previous parliament. This would be a progressive coalition strategy: Labour would overcome the inevitable churn of voters by securing voters Reform cannot.

What would the strategy of building a progressive coalition entail?

There would be four key pillars to such a strategy.

## **1. Rejecting the radical right and highlighting the costs of reform**

The current public discourse is creeping ever rightwards. This has to change. Showing that Labour in no way seeks to emulate Reform will be key to winning support back from lost culturally liberal voters. It will also assist in protecting Labour's current base of support. And by better highlighting the costs of a Reform administration, such as reduced spending on public services due to tax cuts for the wealthiest, some economically left-wing Reform switchers could be regained.

## **2. Changing the narrative and limiting mistakes**

Currently, Reform controls the narrative, and Labour reacts to it. This is increasing the perception that Labour is just mimicking Reform. Researchers from the University of Southampton found that when voters were exposed to Labour's immigration messaging, they became less likely to support Labour and more likely to

perceive Labour as right-wing. Labour should instead focus its communication on the work it is doing to improve the economy, raise the standard of living and fix public services.

This would help develop a more positive message of a proactive government solving problems and reduce the perception that it is dancing to Reform's tune. By focusing on everyday concerns around the economy and public services and how government can best handle them, a more positive dialogue could be constructed with the left-liberal base Labour needs to retain and regain.

Of course, changing the narrative is not just about comms: Labour cannot afford more policy mistakes. Unpopular policies, such as disability benefit cuts and the cut to winter fuel payments, have drowned out the government's achievements and damaged the Labour brand, as confirmed by YouGov and More in Common. Additionally, this has reduced time and energy that can be given to speaking proudly about the government's notable achievements.

### **3. Labour's purpose: winning back left-liberal voters with progressive values**

Adopting a clear progressive platform could give the Labour government the clear identity, purpose and agenda it is searching for. Fifty-three per cent of their 2024 support base are in favour of higher taxation, with an even higher proportion of those lost to the Lib Dems and Greens in the last parliament also holding this position. Further, 43 per cent of Labour's 2024 base support greater redistribution, with a large proportion of 2019-2024 losses sharing this view.

Notably, this makes such thoughts an area of unusually high agreement within a divided electorate. This does not mean Labour should lurch to the left and adopt radical economic policies; a negative reaction from the bond markets would reduce the proportion of government spending that could be allocated towards improving public services.

It is also important to note that not all 2024 voters are as enthusiastic about greater spending levels. Yet it does show that the government may have greater scope for fiscal policy changes than is often assumed. By increasing investment in the economy and public services, it could better unite a group of voters large enough to win them the next election. It would also give Labour a clearer

purpose: a mission to improve the economy, raise the standard of living and fix broken services.

#### **4. Providing reassurances that Labour can do the job**

Whatever strategy is deployed, a common concern amongst the voters Labour has lost resides within the party's perceived ability to handle the economy, day-to-day fiscal decisions and key public services (see Figure 4). While governments always experience churn of support (the so-called 'cost of governing') Labour has not helped itself in its first year in office. To decrease churn and win back lost voters, Labour must reinstate a sense of stability. High-profile resignations must be avoided, and the cabinet must deliver the change Labour promised. In particular, it must deliver an improved economy that raises the standard of living and improves poorly functioning public services.

## Endnotes

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<sup>1</sup> UK Wages continue to outpace inflation, BBC, March 2025