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Edition #4

Inside Reform

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Your guide to the rise of Reform UK



Reform UK is on course to emerge as the defining force of the 2026 local elections.

After winning 677 seats (41% of those contested) and taking control of 10 councils last year, the party could go significantly further on 7 May, current projections suggest, potentially securing more than 1,500 seats and establishing itself as the biggest winner of the cycle. Far from plateauing, Reform UK's electoral base is expanding.

This surge is set against a backdrop of historic decline for both main parties. Labour is projected to lose well over 1,500 councillors, potentially rising to 2,000, while the Conservative Party faces substantial further losses.

In this context, Reform UK is not just gaining ground – it is capitalising on a fragmentation in British politics. This edition of **Inside Reform** focuses on where those gains are most likely to materialise, and what the results could mean across England, Scotland, Wales and London.

Ahead of 7 May, this report tracks the key electoral battlegrounds, assesses where Reform UK is best placed to convert momentum into control of more local authorities, and examines how its support is reshaping contests across the UK.



Seb Grace
Consultant



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A Divided Field

The May 2026 local elections, spanning over 4,800 council seats across England alongside devolved contests in Scotland and Wales, represent the most significant electoral test since the 2024 General Election, and a key indicator of how far Reform UK can translate polling strength into votes.

This is not a conventional two-party contest. Across much of the country, the political landscape has fractured, creating openings for insurgent gains:

Reform UK drawing support from both Labour and Conservative voters

Greens advancing in urban and student-heavy areas

Liberal Democrats consolidating in parts of southern England

This fragmentation is increasing the likelihood of No Overall Control councils, minority administrations, and unstable coalitions.

At the same time, incumbency advantage has sharply declined. Fewer than 40% of Labour and Conservative councillors have been re-elected in recent cycles, pointing to a large intake of new representatives..

Taken together, these dynamics point to an electoral environment unusually open to disruption—one in which **Reform UK** is well placed to take advantage.



England

Reform UK is projected to gain over 1,300 seats, more than doubling its current number of councillors.

Essex

A traditional Conservative stronghold now under pressure, with Reform targeting disillusioned right-leaning voters.

North East

Labour heartlands like Sunderland are showing vulnerability as cost-of-living concerns and national politics reshape voting behaviour.

Local election battles up and down the country are being framed by Reform UK as referenda on Prime Minister Keir Starmer, and cost-of-living pressures are leaving voters receptive to the case.

North West

Red Wall towns, including Barnsley and Wakefield seeing fractured loyalties, with Reform UK gaining traction among disaffected voters.

West Midlands

Reform UK projected to top polls across most councils, with strong performances in Dudley, Walsall and Tamworth.



Wales

Wales represents the most dramatic potential political realignment of this election cycle. Labour has dominated Welsh politics, governing since the creation of the Senedd in 1999.

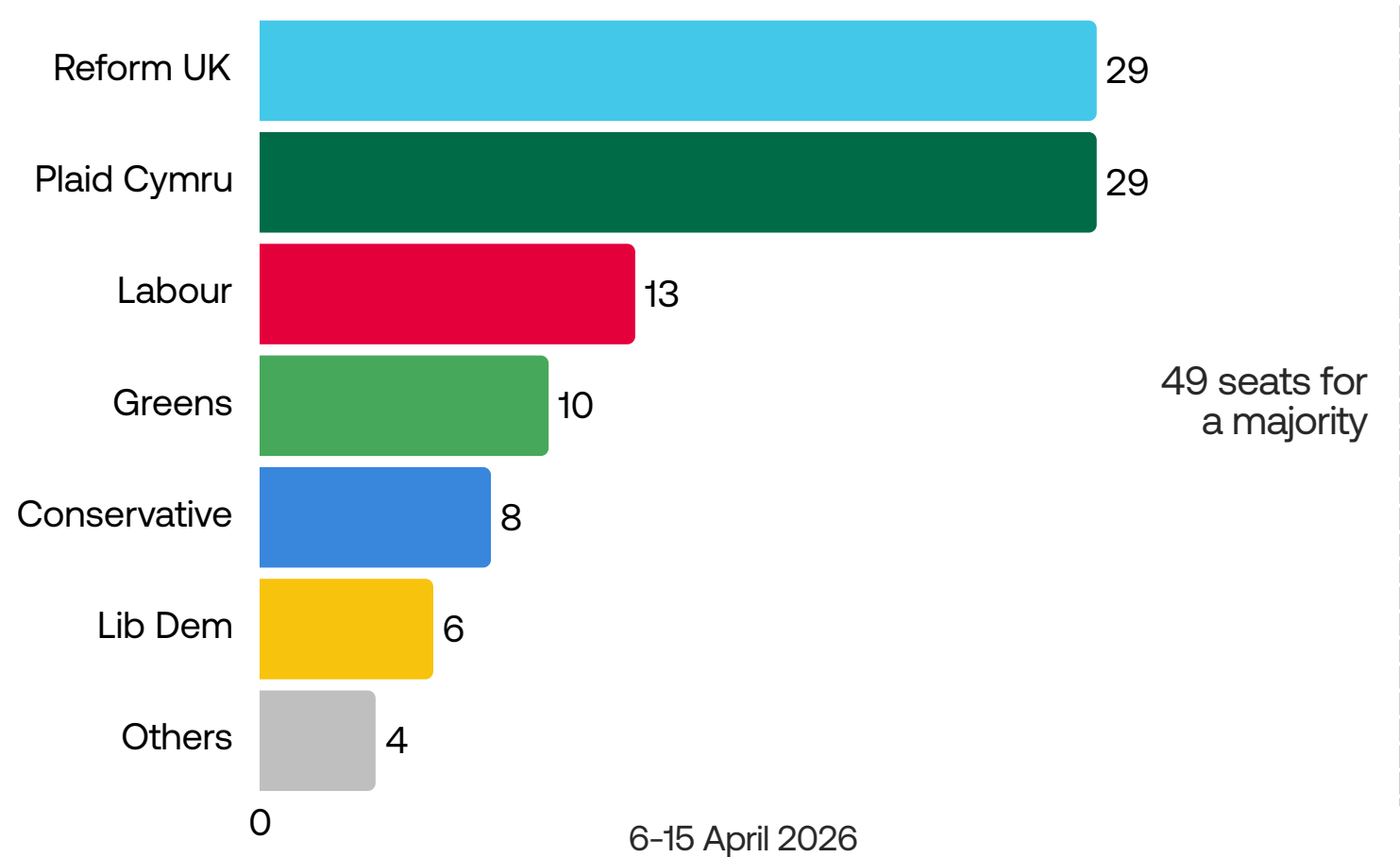
Current projections suggest Labour could fall to third place with just 12 seats, overtaken by both Reform UK and Plaid Cymru, who are running neck-and-neck for first. Reform UK alone is forecast to secure as many as 37 seats, an extraordinary surge from effectively no representation at the last election.

This shift is being driven by deep voter dissatisfaction with the status quo, particularly around public services and the cost of living. Reform UK and Plaid are successfully consolidating distinct parts of the electorate — Reform UK among more culturally conservative voters, and Plaid among those prioritising Welsh identity and governance.

However, the outcome remains highly uncertain. No party is expected to secure a majority, and coalition arithmetic points strongly towards a Plaid-led administration.

YouGov’s Senedd MRP poll shows Reform UK and Plaid Cymru neck and neck on vote share

“If there were a Senedd (Welsh Parliament) election tomorrow, which party would you vote for?” Based on modelled responses of 3,069 Welsh adults aged 16+



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Scotland

In Scotland, the **SNP is on course to remain the largest party and could secure a narrow majority, extending nearly two decades in power since 2007.**

Labour is projected to fall to its lowest level of representation since devolution, with forecasts suggesting it could secure as few as 12% of seats. The Conservatives are also set for further decline, continuing a long-term erosion of support.

At the same time, Reform UK is poised for a breakthrough. From effectively no presence in Holyrood, the party is projected to gain around 20 seats, becoming the largest right-leaning force in the Scottish Parliament and reshaping the opposition landscape.

This decline is particularly significant in the context of Scotland's constitutional divide. The Tories are the traditional principal unionist force, yet their weakening presence risks diluting that voice within Holyrood.

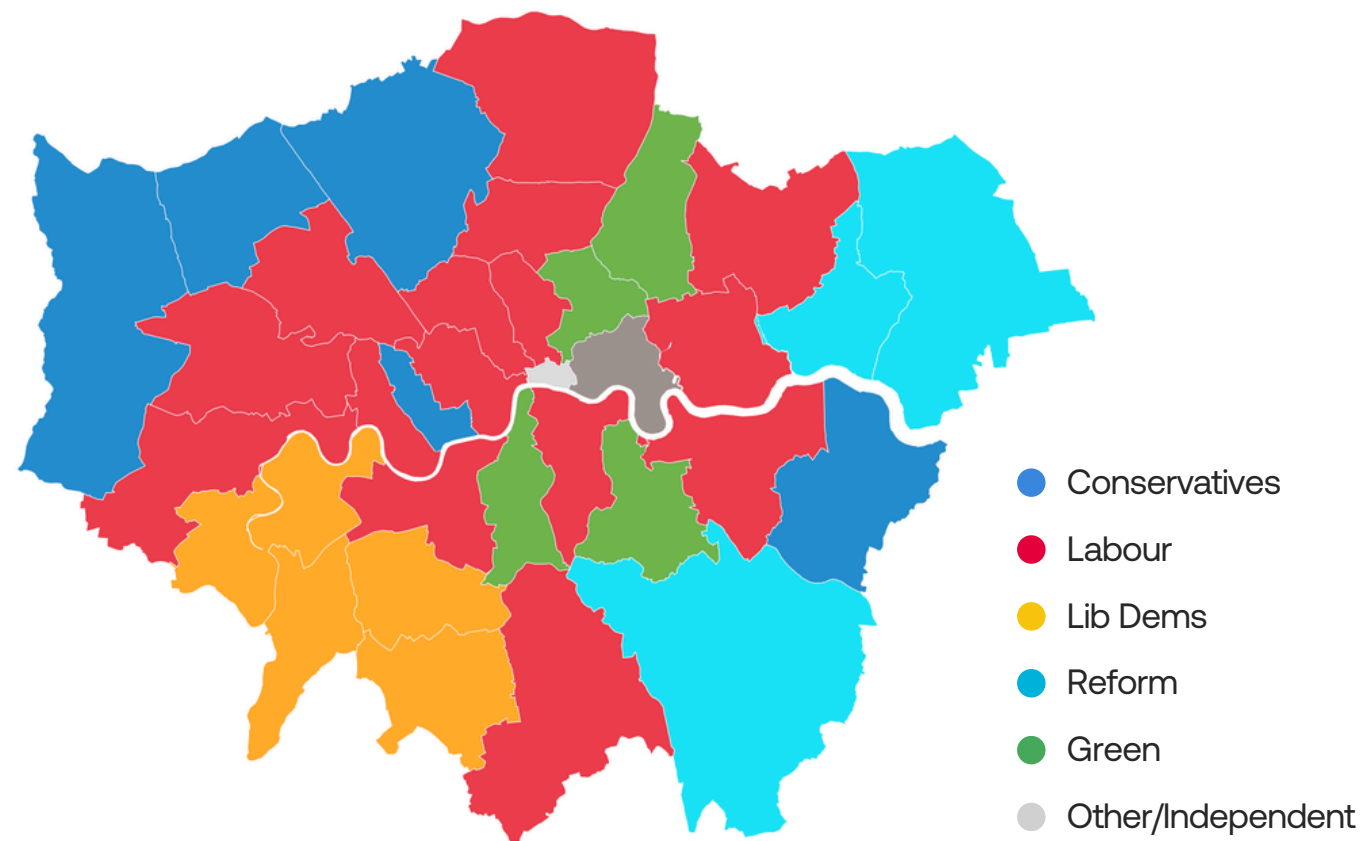
While the pro-independence party is expected to retain a parliamentary majority, the issue itself has been less central to the campaign, with voters more focused on day-to-day concerns around the economy, public services and immigration.



London

London council election MRP

Based on modelled responses of 4,548 adults in London polled between March 27 – April 21



Map: The Times and The Sunday Times | Source: YouGov MRP | Map data: ©Crown copyright and database right 2018

The “Outer Doughnut” Strategy

Reform UK enters the May 2026 elections polling just under 30% nationally. In London, support is lower but still notable at around 17%, placing the party third.

The scale of its expansion is significant. From just 32 candidates in 2022, Reform UK is now contesting 1,564 seats across London, with full slates in 15 boroughs.

This growth is being channelled into a focused outer London strategy. The party is targeting boroughs including Havering, Bexley and Bromley, alongside Hillingdon, Sutton, Barking & Dagenham and Croydon.

This approach mirrors previous Tory mayoral campaign strategies, and the latest polling suggests it could deliver a breakthrough.

Reform UK is leading in Havering and is competitive in Barking & Dagenham and Bexley, raising the prospect of its first London council.

These target areas share a number of characteristics, including strong Leave votes and a history of Conservative control.

In Bromley and Bexley, Reform UK is building on recent by-election gains and Conservative defections, with ambitions extending beyond incremental gains towards No Overall Control or outright control.

The party is also testing its reach in inner London, fielding full slates of candidates in boroughs such as Wandsworth, Westminster, and Kensington & Chelsea. This will concern local Tories.



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Stay tuned!

Get in touch

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