**The Coming British Election – and its Likely Aftermath**

1. **Introduction**

The British Prime Minister, Rishi Sunak, has recently announced that there will be a General Election on July 4th. This came as a surprise – not least to some of his own Members of Parliament. The date of an election was up to him to decide, but he was under constraints. As a BBC website indicates:[[1]](#endnote-1)

The latest a Parliament can be dissolved for a general election is on the fifth anniversary of the day it first met. For the current Parliament, that means 17 December 2024. However, 25 working days are then allowed to prepare for the election. So, the next election must be held by 28 January 2025.

The General Election is likely to witness devastatingly bad results for the Conservative Party, and the election of a Labour government with a large majority.[[2]](#endnote-2) Labour will have made gains at the expense of the Conservatives, but they are also likely to gain a number of seats from the Scottish National Party. There is a risk, however, that the Labour Party will find political power a poisoned chalice, and that we will subsequently see the rise of populism on both the left and the right of British politics.

Why did the Prime Minister decide to hold a General Election before he had to? This has puzzled many commentators.[[3]](#endnote-3) But one might imagine that he had come to the conclusion that some recent relatively good news – that the economy was not doing quite as badly as it had been, and also that the while rate of inflation had come down[[4]](#endnote-4) - meant that he thought that the electorate might be more optimistic than it has been in the immediate past.

1. **The Run-Up to the Election**

In Britain, the Conservative Party has been in power for 14 years. It has faced various problems through this time, which are currently getting worse. Some of these relate to the Conservative Party itself; others to more general and persistent difficulties facing the country.

In 1962, the American statesman Dean Acheson said: ‘Britian has lost an Empire but not yet found a role.’ Part of Britain’s problem has indeed been that while the Empire collapsed, Britain continues to have delusions about its own importance in the world. This has been matched by steady relative economic decline, which has become dramatically worse since the global financial crisis. Britain was – eventually – able to join the EU, but was uneasy about its membership (despite being able to gain exemptions from a variety of EU policies). Part of the problem was that Britain still saw itself as a major world power. Part of the problem was that its economic situation was different from that of many of the EU countries.[[5]](#endnote-5) There were also underlying problems about the differences between the British legal system and constitutional arrangements, and those which were typical in the EU.[[6]](#endnote-6) But perhaps the major issues which prompted ‘Brexit’ related to fantasies about how Britain might be able to conduct itself, if it were not in the EU.

Over the years there had been concerns about the EU expressed from different ends of the political spectrum. One concern on the Left was the idea that membership of the EU limited the degree to which certain forms of ‘socialism’ could be pursued.[[7]](#endnote-7) (I have put ‘socialism’ in quotation marks, just because of a major ambiguity in Britain as to what this might involve. The British Labour Party has, through its history, comprised an uneasy alliance between people – headed by the industrial Trades Unions – whose concern was to improve the material conditions of working people within broadly existing social and economic arrangements, and those who thought that some alternative form of social and economic organization was needed. What this alternative was supposed to be, was unclear. The main ideas about this have tended to alternate between one form or another of control of industry by those who work in it, and State socialism. In practical terms, what one had was – after the Second World War – the nationalization of various parts of the economy while the rest of the economy functioned on the basis of a market economy together with a ‘welfare state’, providing retirement pensions, social benefits and a ‘National Health Service’ free at the point of delivery. In addition, there was a tendency to introduce various forms of unsystematic economic planning or piecemeal intervention into a market economy, together with capital investment in industry where there were strong political pressures for so doing.

In broad terms, those parts of the economy which were under the control of the government have been characterised by conservatism in their practises but have been subject to strong influences from Trades Unions. Britain has been distinguished by strong traditions of research in its universities, but by being poor in the economic development of the opportunities to which this might lead. While there were some exceptions – Britain’s chemical giant ICI was an example – it also tended, in recent years, to do badly in the development of large and innovative industrial companies. Further, trades unions have seemed increasingly concerned with protecting the interests of their own members, without real concern for the overall impact of what they did in pursuit of this, on the economy.

Mrs Thatcher as Conservative leader, attempted to address this situation. But part of the problem was that attempts at the rationalization of parts of the British economy were received as if they were simply the product of a kind of animus on her part against working people and working-class communities. While other areas of the economy – e.g. water and sewage; the railways – were denationalized without, in my view, sufficient thought having been given to what the problems and issues would be facing companies in these areas when not under governmental ownership.[[8]](#endnote-8)

Mrs Thatcher was also somewhat ambivalent towards the EU. She was hostile towards moves in the direction of Federalism, while at the same time pressing for more by way of a common market for goods and services. The heritage of Thatcher, however, was – for part of the Conservative Party – an uncritical espousal of the rhetoric of markets and entrepreneurship, and of the cutting of taxes, without detailed thought given to policy about what this would mean. Another strand within the Party, which built on her misgivings about European federalism, became increasingly hostile towards the EU. It ended up pressing for ‘Brexit’. The Conservatives, on this point, faced electoral pressure from ‘UKIP’ a ‘Brexit’ Party led by a witty populist, Nigel Farage. They ended up agreeing to a referendum on the issue.

What those who favoured it expected from Brexit, however, was ambiguous. In part, the idea spoke to people who wished, somehow, to ‘take back control’ in an increasingly globalized world. In this, things seemed to be in flux, in ways that disadvantaged them. In part, it offered a semi-Imperial reassertion of British independence. But the idea of ‘freedom’ from the EU also suggested (incompatible) possibilities for doing things which EU regulations ruled out. Those on the entrepreneurial right, dreamed of a low-regulation ’Singapore on Thames’. Some on the left, of government being able to operate actively in the economy in ways that were ruled out by EU membership. Brexit had a populist character, which was exploited by Boris Johnson. He also offered the vision of a government-led ‘levelling up’ of the economy. This attracted – via their initial support of Brexit – some voters in the post-industrial North of the country into supporting the Conservative Party. These were people who would more traditionally have been Labour voters, and who moved from Labour to Brexit, before eventually voting for the Conservatives under Johnson.

All this meant that the Conservative Party itself ended up being split in roughly three ways. First there are ‘Thatcherites’ who favoured market-based approaches, but – as Lis Truss exemplified when she was briefly in office – often in wooden and un-thought-out ways. The current Conservative leader, Rishi Sunak, might be seen as a serious-minded and somewhat technocratic and also flexible member of this tradition. Second, there are populists. They tended to embrace ideas about ‘levelling up’, but also to be agitated about issues to do with immigration, and ‘culture wars’. There are also more centralist ‘one nation’ Conservatives. They are less ideological in their approach, and tend to favour policies not all that different to those favoured by people on the right of the Labour Party.

The Conservatives also faced the difficulty with younger people. With increasing numbers of young people going to university, and their exposure there to liberal ideas in the U.S. sense, there has been a shift of support for Conservatives from the young, university educated, to those without a university education, and the elderly. As has been noted in the press, there has also started, in both Britain and the United States, to be a split within the views of younger people, with young women starting to take more liberal views than young men.[[9]](#endnote-9)

The elderly also posed a problem for the Conservatives, in the sense that the Conservatives adopted a policy of making regular, and generous, annual rises to the rate of the state retirement pension. It is not clear that either major party can go back on these. But when inflation has been high, and with the elderly forming an increasing proportion of the population, such increases have become increasingly expensive. And because pensions, while notionally contributory,[[10]](#endnote-10) are universal and are in fact paid for by current taxpayers, the existing arrangements can end up taking funds from relatively poor working people, and redistributing them to all pensioners, whether or not they are in need. The Conservatives are also facing the difficulty that, if they wish the economy to grow, some reforms – e.g. to planning laws – to which the more affluent elderly are attached (as the basis of ‘NIMBY’ resistance to change[[11]](#endnote-11)), would be difficult to bring in.[[12]](#endnote-12)

It is the Labour Party which, as I have indicated, is likely to benefit from all this. They have – by way of a top-down revolution – changed their character, getting rid of Jeremy Corbyn and his supporters, and the kind of radicalism with which he was associated. They have, in its place, restored something close to Tony Blair’s ‘New Labour’. That is to say, their approach is not too different to what the current Conservative leader, Rishi Sunak, would do, if he did not have to make concessions to the populist wing of the Conservative Party and to his elderly or NIMBY-inclined supporters. Labour is offering a platform which stresses reform, competence, and responsibility in its policies. They also stress how much is currently going very badly wrong. I will discuss this, and the difficulties that Labour will have in dealing with it, below.

Before I do so, I need to say a little about Scotland. A good measure of political devolution has taken place in the UK, in respect of Scotland and Wales. (I will not here discuss Northern Ireland, the politics of which pose complex problems, very much of their own.[[13]](#endnote-13)) In the devolved Parliament in Scotland, the Scottish National Party has (in a coalition until recently with the small Scottish Green Party) a majority. They currently also hold a majority of Scottish seats in the British Parliament at Westminster.

Scottish Nationalism was, historically, very much a minority concern. During the Twentieth Century, its devotees ran the entire gamut between strongly socialist and fascist ideas. Scotland, however, tended to be strongly Labour supporting, with exceptions in the Borders between Scotland and England, and in the remote Highlands and Islands.[[14]](#endnote-14) However, in 2015 there was a marked turn towards the SNP, under the moderate and competent leadership of Nicola Sturgeon. Labour representation at Westminster was drastically reduced. People in Scotland had not taken well to the Labour Party under Corbyn’s leadership, which had appealed particularly to educated young people in English cities.

The SNP’s appeal was to ideas about Scottish independence. These were – and are – rooted in concerns about English cultural dominance of a country which had distinctive traditions and institutions of its own. In more recent times, this took the form of an instinctive dislike of ‘Thatcherite’ conservatism, and of a Labour Party which seemed to be focused on Westminster.

When holding power in the devolved Scottish parliament, the SNP itself became more radical and ‘woke’ than was Labour after Corbyn,[[15]](#endnote-15) notably when the SNP were in alliance with the Scottish Greens. It was also not particularly competent in the conduct of government within Scotland. Nicola Sturgeon, who had come over as very effective through the Covid period – especially in contrast to the Westminster government under Johnson – subsequently resigned when the SNP was involved in complex financial scandals in connection with which her husband, a senior SNP administrator, is currently facing legal action. In broad terms, the more moderate left-inclined approach of the Labour Party under Sir Keith Starmer seems more in tune with people’s sentiments than is the SNP. The SNP have also just gone through a further change in their leadership. But it is not clear to what extent this will lead to new policies.

I would currently expect that the SNP will lose several seats to Labour. The key problems have been a lack of competence in running basic services – e.g. the National Health Service and education. This has been combined with really dire performance in, for example, the construction of ferry boats to serve the Scottish islands, and the promotion of a scheme for the recycling of bottles for which, at the end of the day, they could not get the agreement of the English government. Extensive plans for a ‘green’ transformation of the economy appeared not to work, while the pursuit of policies to assist trans-gender people was undertaken in ways that raised concern because it seemed disrespectful to women’s views about same-sex spaces.

Above all,[[16]](#endnote-16) there is a problem about what independence would actually mean. The SNP would be keen to re-enter the EU. But how that would work (assuming that the EU would agree to its admission – Spain’s attitude, in the light of pressure for Catalan independence, could here pose a problem) is not clear. Not only is Scotland fully integrated, commercially, with England. But there are problems about what the border would mean for places in the southernmost areas of Scotland, for which towns in England such as Berwick on Tweed and Carlisle serve as important regional centres.

1. **The Problems Facing the British Labour Party**

There has recently started to be commentary about just how difficult the situation is that Labour is likely to inherit.[[17]](#endnote-17) Labour’s shadow Chancellor of the Exchequer – shadow finance minister – has admitted this, while stressing her responsibility, in the sense of indicating that she will not depart significantly from the financial guidelines which the Conservatives have adopted. The difficulty is that what she will be able to accomplish within such guidelines is likely to be extremely limited, and the problems facing her would be huge.

Let me review these briefly.

An initial, and massive, problem is that the British population is ageing. This should have come as no surprise to any government. But it poses difficult issues. A key one relates to Britain’s National Health Service and Welfare State. This was set up in its current form on a ‘pay as you go’ basis, after the Second World War. That is to say, it was simply funded from taxation on an ongoing basis. This, clearly, was attractive when it was first set up, when there were many more people in the workforce than there were those who benefitted from the Welfare State. But in current circumstances – with older people living longer, and there being more of them relative to the working population – things have become precarious.

In part, the problem is that as people live longer, they make increasing demands on these services. Elderly people may become frail, and also may well suffer from multiple ailments at the same time. In addition, Britain has hit a problem with residential care for the elderly. This is not provided as part of the National Health Service, but privately, with individuals subsidised by local government when they need assistance. However, the level at which local government pays for this is low (its funding has also been strongly cut by central government), and there are nowhere as many places for the elderly as are needed.

Brexit has, here, posed a problem, in the sense of cutting off a supply of people from elsewhere in the EU who were willing to work – at low wages – in care homes. The shortage of care home accommodation has resulted in people who only needed the limited kind of care that they could provide, having to remain in over-crowded hospitals. In addition, a system of dentistry provided at low cost via the National Health Service has collapsed. Dentists are, more and more frequently, not offering NHS service[[18]](#endnote-18) - with the result that, if people cannot pay to go to dentists privately, they are ending up without dental services. This has led to horror stories in the tabloid press about some people even trying to pull out their own teeth.[[19]](#endnote-19)

All this, on the face of it, might seem open to relatively simple remedy: that the government should spend more, and either pay for it by borrowing or by increasing taxation. But the aftermath of low growth since the global financial crisis, and the costs of Covid, have raised government borrowing, which – with interest rates becoming and then remaining relatively high – has been difficult to service. As British tax rates are historically high (for Britain), the combination of low growth and price increases consequential to the Russian invasion of Ukraine, have left many people unwilling to pay more and to what is experienced by many as a ‘cost of living crisis’.

It should also be said that, since the global financial crisis, British governments have acted on the basis of ‘austerity’. A significant element of their policy has been an unwillingness to undertake capital spending, and a drastic cutting back of what central government has given to local government. A consequence of all this is that, at almost every turn, services for which the government, central or local, is responsible are in a dire situation. Buildings – e.g. in schools and hospitals – which were constructed using Reinforced Autoclaved Aerated Concrete need work urgently done to replace it. Roads are full of potholes which local authorities cannot afford to remedy. The legal service in courts is under-funded, and cannot keep up with the cases that need to go before it. While the prison system is desperately overcrowded… I will not continue, but the picture is clear enough, with new problems being highlighted in the news every morning.

In addition, there are further, key issues in the background. Putin’s invasion of Ukraine has highlighted the fact that Britain has been under-spending on defence.[[20]](#endnote-20) The possibility of a second Trump presidency (and the growing sympathy for isolationism in America[[21]](#endnote-21)), makes it clear that Europe cannot be sure of continuing American support, and will have to move, over time, to carry the full costs of defending itself.

Climate change also poses massive problems. Britain faces the need for huge expenditure on infrastructure, to shift from using natural gas to heat pumps for domestic heating, and to electric cars for transportation. On the face of it, this calls for the improvement of the electricity supply (and of the creation of expensive dams, or other technical fixes, to handle supply when wind power is not available). But another really significant problem is the poor quality of Britain’s housing stock, a lot of which is old, poorly built and badly insulated. (Indeed, there has been, for a long period, an under-supply of housing, which has made mobility difficult, and has led to terrible problems for people who depend on the private rented housing sector.)

In the face of all this, while the Labour Party is likely to come to power, and with a large majority, it is difficult to imagine that they will be able to make people feel that things are going much better than they were under the Conservatives. For not only will the problems still be there, but Labour will be committed to approaches to them which will not be all that different from those of the present, Conservative government. There are simply not the resources to do anything very different, while if they did depart from such policies – e.g. by increasing borrowing – this would be likely to reduce international confidence in the British pound. Some issues will be easier: it will not be as difficult for Labour to face down NIMBY objectors to forms of development which will improve growth. But they are likely to face expectations that they will be able to do dramatically better on some of the outstanding issues, together with the idea that they will be ready to engage in capital investment in areas attractive to the Trades Unions, or to people who were looking forward to ‘levelling up’ under Johnson.

1. **The Future of British Politics**

If Labour is not successful in power, what will be the consequences? One worry is that it will be likely to lead to a growth of populism, on both the Left and the Right.

If, as I would expect, the Conservatives do badly in the election, it would seem likely that Sunak will lose his position to a more populist leader. There have been continuing concerns about immigration; and the Conservatives under Sunak are likely to lose some votes (but not seats in Parliament) to the populist Reform Party[[22]](#endnote-22) (This in turn would make it that much more likely that a Conservative leader after Sunak would be a populist, as this would undermine the appeal of the Reform Party.) It is worth noting that in both Poland and Hungary, older more conservative parties became populist.[[23]](#endnote-23) And it was striking that, in the context of his populist drive to ‘get Brexit done’, Boris Johnson was able to gain support for all kinds of breaches to the traditional constraints on the power of the British Prime Minister. There are plenty of candidates for such a role,[[24]](#endnote-24) and, as Brexit showed, there is support for a populist approach among parts of the population. The Conservatives’ problem would be: what would any of this mean in terms of policies which would actually address Britain’s problems? (Although, one might say that Brexit demonstrated that this would not necessarily stop people from voting for parties which take such a view.)

Labour, however, would also face difficulties. Jeremy Corbyn, a traditional leftist who also embraced some ‘woke’ ideas – and the authenticity of whom was a refreshing contrast to the focus-group driven approach of Tony Blair’s ‘New Labour’ – was popular especially among younger urban people. He and his followers were sidelined in a somewhat brutal fashion by the present Labour leader Sir Kier Starmer, and those associated with him, who took back control of the Labour leadership. But if Labour is not able to address the difficult problems that I have outlined, many of its own supporters may react against it. Corbyn is, in fact, going to fight his old seat in North London, as an independent.

There will, I think, be four sources of problems for Labour. First, there is, still, within the Labour Party and its fringes, some support for the Marxist left, notably among those attracted to small Trotskyist groups. Their numbers are indeed small, but they are well-organised and can reliably be found supporting forms of industrial action, and protests about British foreign policy.[[25]](#endnote-25) Second, there are people who supported Corbyn. They would not wish, when there is the prospect of a Labour government, to do anything to weaken the Labour Party (Corbyn’s own decision to run against the Labour Party was unusual). But once Labour was in power, and it became clear how limited the resulting Labour government was in what it could undertake, one would expect that there would be a resurgence in ‘Corbynite’ ideas and associated activities. Third, there have been sporadic strikes and other forms of industrial action in the public sector of the economy – from the health service, through teachers and lecturers, to groups, such as train drivers, who while being employed by private companies are in a sector of the economy which depends on government financial support. These people are likely to expect that things will change under a Labour government, and to be disappointed when they don’t.[[26]](#endnote-26) Finally, it is noticeable that if one reads **The Guardian** – Britain’s leading quality newspaper on the moderate Left – the almost constant refrain is that things are working badly under the Conservatives, and that much more needs to be spent on various social causes. But if a new Labour government does not meet such expectations – which it is not clear that it can – all this animus will be turned against them.

1. **Conclusion**

All told, my expectation is, thus, that the Labour Party will win the next British election. (Although I should stress, as a former student of Karl Popper’s, that the future is open!) I would also expect that there will, in fact, be a good deal of continuity with what the Conservatives are currently doing under Sunak. However, they will be likely to ditch concessions that Sunak has made to populists in his own party and the electorate, such as the idea of shipping some people who come by boat as refugees to Rwanda, and idiotic ideas about a new form of ‘National Service’ for people when they become eighteen. Labour should also be in a better position to resist NIMBY objections to development which would be good for the economy. How much impact they will be able to make on Britain’s underlying problems, however, remains to be seen. And it is not clear – despite their stressing its importance as an issue – that Labour will be able to do much in the face of Britain’s key problem of low economic growth.[[27]](#endnote-27)

The problems posed by the threat of populism are difficult – not least because of the way in which many people have shifted to relying on Social Media for news. But it might be sensible for major political parties to give some thought to whether there are measures that they might take together to address these issues. For example, while stressing the differences between the ways in which they would wish to tackle the problems, might they work out the degree to which they can agree just what some of the current problems are, and why some of the more fanciful – but nonetheless appealing – responses to them would not work? These things would, obviously, have to be presented in a manner such that those who disagree were able to engage in critical discussion about them. And care would have to be taken to try to make sure that any such exercise would not, in itself, look conspiratorial. But there is a danger, otherwise, that we may lose touch with the key, deliberative, element to politics completely, and encounter the kinds of problems that have come to the fore with Donald Trump in the United States.

1. See https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-62064552. [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. This was borne out by local elections in many areas of England, in early May 2024. The Conservatives did badly, but Labour not as well as it would be expected to do in a general election, as in local elections there tends to be more support for smaller parties. [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. See, for example, ‘Rishi Sunak’s snap election is odd and illogical—much like him’, **The Economist**, May 22, 2024. https://www.economist.com/britain/2024/05/22/rishi-sunaks-snap-election-is-odd-and-illogical-much-like-him [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. But that there was no sign that interest rates would fall significantly in the immediate future. [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. Britain has a small agricultural sector, and is particularly dependent on service industries. [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
6. In part, this related to differences between England’s common law system, and Roman law traditions elsewhere. In part, it related to Britain not having a formal written constitution, and to the way in which Parliamentary decision-taking would be seen as secondary to that of judges, should it be the case that there was a written constitution the interpretation of which was in the hands of a Supreme Court. [↑](#endnote-ref-6)
7. There has been continuing concern about this from some people on the Left, with analogies being drawn between the EU and some of Hayek’s ideas about inter-state federalism. [↑](#endnote-ref-7)
8. See, for what I think is still a very useful overview of some of the issues, **Marquette Law Review** 71, 1988, issue 3. [↑](#endnote-ref-8)
9. See **The Economist**, March 14th, 2024 ‘Making sense of the gulf between young men and women’, https://www.economist.com/leaders/2024/03/14/making-sense-of-the-gulf-between-young-men-and-women [↑](#endnote-ref-9)
10. That is to say, people who are at work and not at the age when they could receive a state pension, pay a ‘national insurance’ contribution. This, however, is treated by the government as just another revenue stream rather than forming a fund to pay for pensions. When people are eligible for a state pension (currently 66; it will gradually increase), they can receive a state pension, the size of which depends on how long they have been making payments. It is not means tested. [↑](#endnote-ref-10)
11. ‘NIMBY’ stands for ‘Not In My Back Yard’ – i.e. For people who while not, say, opposed to economic development in principle, will strongly oppose anything which adversely affects them. For a way round this problem, see Jeremy and Richard Shearmur, ‘NIMBY? Back Yard Bonus!’, **Policy**, 26, 2010, pp. 32-36. [↑](#endnote-ref-11)
12. It is not that these people would shift to supporting Labour – who, as we shall see, would be more likely to bring in such measures – so much as that they might vote, instead, for the (small) Liberal Democrat party. I have not discussed the Liberal Democrats here, because, even at their most successful, it is not clear that they could do more than trade their support for the adoption of particular policies by a major party. Their last experience of coalition government – with the Conservatives – was a disaster for them. [↑](#endnote-ref-12)
13. To cut a very long story short, these are the product of colonial-style settlement of parts of Ireland, which was traditionally Catholic, by Protestants of different kinds, at the behest of British governments. They were concerned about strategic risks posed by a Catholic Ireland – in league with Continental Catholic powers – against a Protestant England. There was some grim expropriation of land by the British, and Catholic Irish people fared badly under British rule. Ireland eventually achieved independence, but an area – Northern Ireland – was carved out, which enjoyed a Protestant majority. It also had a large – and growing – Catholic population, which suffered under Protestant rule. The Catholics wished to re-unite with Southern Ireland, where they would be in a majority. Terrorism took place, eventually leading to a power-sharing agreement, within a country in which, however, the Catholics now have a small majority. [↑](#endnote-ref-13)
14. This cuts a long and complex story very short. For a useful overview, see https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History\_of\_the\_Scottish\_National\_Party [↑](#endnote-ref-14)
15. E.g. in terms of controversial issues about freedom of speech, the rights of transgender people, and its strong advocacy of a ceasefire in Gaza. [↑](#endnote-ref-15)
16. And despite the idea of independence still being quite popular – markedly more so than the SNP – although there is still a majority against it in Scotland. [↑](#endnote-ref-16)
17. One big problem here has been that servicing government debt is now more expensive than it was when the debt was incurred. A consequence has been that taxation is now at relatively high rates for Britain, with the proceeds of this having to be used to service government debt. [↑](#endnote-ref-17)
18. Dentists typically offer the explanation that the most recent NHS contract that they were given makes it uneconomic for them to offer many NHS services. See for an example: https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-somerset-68413931#:~:text=As%20a%20result%2C%20many%20dentists,struggling%20to%20make%20ends%20meet. [↑](#endnote-ref-18)
19. See for an example https://www.itv.com/news/calendar/2024-02-07/woman-unable-to-get-dentist-pulls-out-12-teeth-with-pliers [↑](#endnote-ref-19)
20. The percentage of GDP spent on defence is above that of many other NATO members. But this is a function of Britain keeping nuclear weapons. [↑](#endnote-ref-20)
21. Itself understandable in terms of the poor track record of American foreign policy over recent years. [↑](#endnote-ref-21)
22. The British ‘first past the post’ electoral system means that they are not likely to lose seats to them, but the Reform Party is likely to attract sufficient numbers of votes to assist the Labour Party take seats from the Conservatives. The Reform Party is, anyway, a strange creature, in fact owned by a company of which Nigel Farage is a major owner. See, on this, ‘Britain’s Reform UK party does not exist’, https://www.economist.com/britain/2024/04/24/britains-reform-uk-party-does-not-exist [↑](#endnote-ref-22)
23. See, on this, Cass Mudde, **The Far Right Today**, Cambridge: Polity, 2019. [↑](#endnote-ref-23)
24. Although it is striking that increasing numbers of Conservative MPs are saying that they will not contest the next election. [↑](#endnote-ref-24)
25. See, for example, the Socialist Workers Party: https://socialistworker.co.uk/ [↑](#endnote-ref-25)
26. It is worth bearing in mind that the backdrop to Mrs Thatcher coming to power was dissatisfaction by unions with a Labour Government, and a period of strikes. [↑](#endnote-ref-26)
27. It is in this context worth recalling that Lis Truss placed emphasis on this. Her problem, in my view, was that she seemed to think that the solution to the problem was tax cuts: something that it was not clear would have been the slightest use, and also something that is simply not viable in today’s Britain. [↑](#endnote-ref-27)