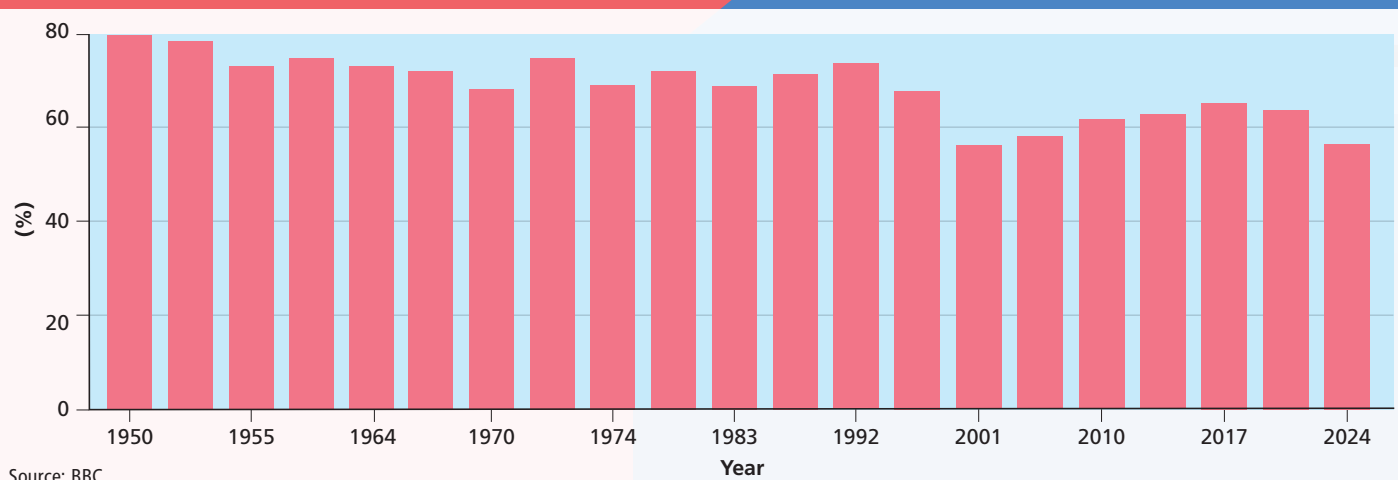


The general election 2024

The UK general election result in 2024 was widely described as a 'landslide' victory for the Labour Party. But was this really a landslide election? And how should we best interpret the result?

Voter turnout

How people vote and how political power works is always of interest to sociologists. Critics have not been slow to point out that the voter turnout in 2024 was down to a near record low level and that this suggests a general disillusionment with party politics, rather than wild enthusiasm for politicians or Labour (see Figure 1). Only 52% of those eligible to do so voted. Parth Patel, a senior research fellow at the Institute for Public Policy Research described the turnout as 'shocking'. He said, 'If democracy is collective self-rule and only half of us are voting, you do have to ask about the other half, who politics and policymaking are less responsive to as a result.'



Source: BBC
Figure 1 UK general election turnout, 1950–2024

Representation

Labour's share of the vote in 2024 was only 34%, even though that party won 63% of the parliamentary seats at stake. In fact, Labour and Conservatives *together* won only 58% of the total votes cast. This has led to a further debate about how *representative* and *democratic* the two-party, first-past-the-post system is. Should we move to a form of *proportional representation* in which the number of seats in the House more closely aligns with the percentage of votes won? If we did so, Reform UK could have up to 94 seats today, instead of the mere five they ended up gaining.

What was also interesting in 2024 was how *age* played out among party voters. All parties target older voters, because they can be more relied upon to vote. As usual, in 2024 the Conservative Party did much better than their rivals in recruiting older voters (see Figure 2). Compared to 2019, Labour gained with over-40s nationally, but despite the message of Figure 2 they suffered compared with 2019 with voters under 40. They had a particular issue in this election with women under 35, dropping 9 points. Among men under 35, they remained solid. Labour attracts younger voters while, generally, other major parties tend to do better with ageing voters.

Female MPs

Another trend that seems clearcut is the increasing number of female MPs who are elected to the House (see Figure 3). The Labour Party leads the field here, and a record 40% — or 129 out of the 322 people elected for the first time — are women. The number of serving Conservative women MPs was decimated in 2024, but both Labour and the Liberal Democrats showed major increases in this respect.

The Labour Party was able, in 2024, to boast the nation's first female chancellor of the exchequer in Rachel Reeves. However, the Tories can still claim the only three serving female prime ministers in UK history, even if the most recent of these, Liz Truss, managed to serve for only 49 days. Being a senior woman politician may not guarantee competence or popularity — or even policies that benefit most women — but we might reasonably assume that having a more representative House of Commons by gender is more likely to produce policies that show insight and offer more equal outcomes for both men and women.

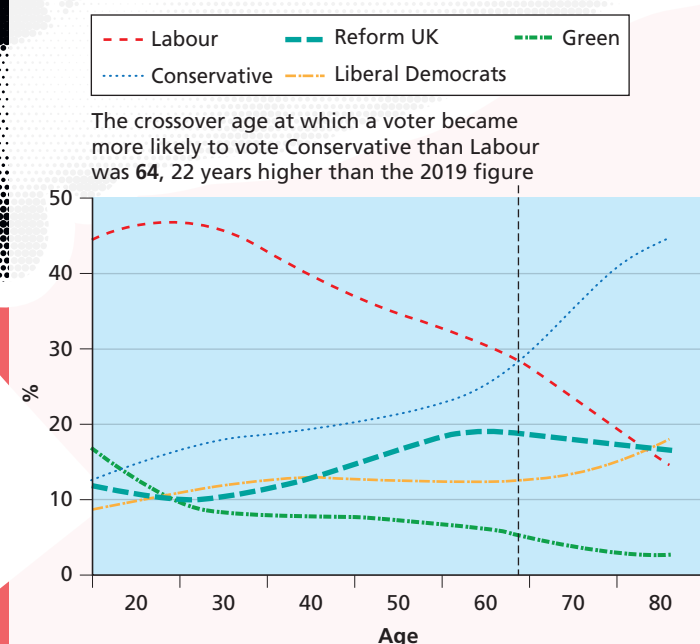
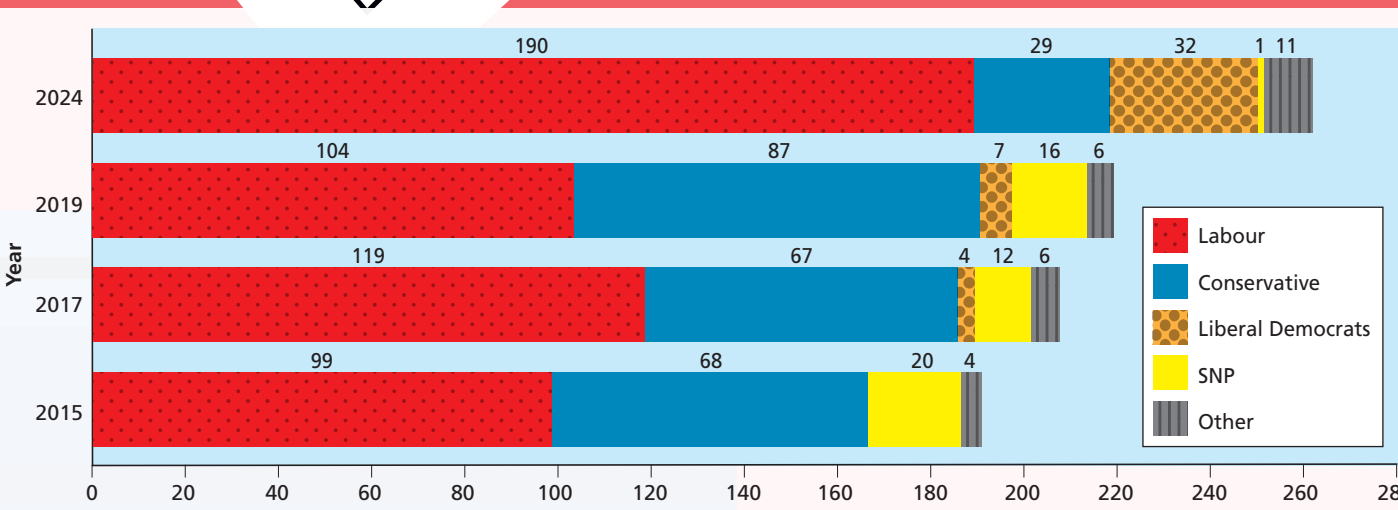


Figure 2 Voting by age, 2024 UK general election



Source: Guardian

Figure 3 Female MPs by political party

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