

**FABIAN
SOCIETY**

CLIMBING THE MOUNTAIN

**LABOUR'S KEY BATTLEFIELDS AT
THE NEXT ELECTION**

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About the author

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About the briefing

This report identifies 150 non-Labour seats on the new boundaries which will likely make up a very high proportion of the constituencies that Labour will target at the next election. This is based on a purely mathematical exercise that takes no account of local political factors. The group is made up of the 125 seats in England and Wales, and 25 seats in Scotland, that Labour would have come closest to winning in 2019, had that election been fought on the new boundaries. The report provides new evidence on voting intention and attitudes in these 150 key seats. This is the first time that this analysis has been undertaken.

About the polling

The Fabian Society commissioned YouGov Plc to survey 2,084 adults across Great Britain. The survey was carried out online. Fieldwork was undertaken between 17 and 18 January 2024. The figures have been weighted and are representative of all GB adults (aged 18+).

In the weighted sample, 528 respondents were from the 150 non-Labour seats.

Introduction

In December 2019, just days after the last general election, the Fabian Society identified the mountain Labour needed to climb to win again. Victory required gaining 123 seats, and a swing of 10.3 percentage points. In 2021, we followed our immediate post-election analysis by identifying a pool of 150 constituencies (125 in England and Wales, 25 in Scotland) that were likely to make up Labour's target seats at the next election. This became our 'Winning 150' constituency grouping.

Since then, much has changed – including the boundaries that the election is to be fought on. Most constituencies (585) will be fought on altered boundaries at the next election.¹

Analysis of the 2019 election result on the new boundaries by Colin Rallings and Michael Thrasher found the Conservatives notionally 'won' 372 seats (up seven) and Labour won 200 (down two, excluding the Speaker).² The Liberal Democrats and Plaid Cymru are also negatively affected (down three and two seats respectively), while the SNP is unaffected in terms of overall seats.

The overall impact is that the Conservatives will be defending a notional majority of 94, compared to their actual 2019 majority of 80.³ To secure a majority after the next election, Labour will need a uniform swing of 12.7 percentage points – and to gain 125 seats.

Following the publication of these notional constituency results, we repeated our analysis to identify a new Winning 150 constituency group. This is made up of the 125 most marginal constituencies in England and Wales for Labour, and the 25 most marginal constituencies in Scotland (see Figure 1). It includes 123 constituencies that have a notional Conservative majority, 25 that have a notional SNP majority, and two that have a notional Plaid Cymru majority.

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Figure 1: Winning 150 seats: Labour's possible target seats at the next election (ordered by required percentage swing from the incumbent party)

0% to 2.5%	2.5% to 5%	5% to 7.5%	7.5% to 10%	10%+
1. Burnley	22. Vale of Glamorgan	51. Darlington	82. Filton + Bradley Stoke	111. Blackpool North + Fleetwood
2. Leigh + Atherton	23. West Bromwich	52. Redcar	83. Glasgow East	112. Monmouthshire
3. High Peak	24. Cheshire Mid	53. Ipswich	84. Uxbridge + South Ruislip	113. Glasgow West
4. Bangor Aberconwy	25. Wakefield + Rothwell	54. Coatbridge + Bellshill	85. Pembrokeshire Mid + South	114. Scarborough + Whitby
5. Wolverhampton West	26. Ynys Môn	55. Altrincham + Sale West	86. Thanet East	115. Dunfermline + Dollar
6. Bury South	27. Derby North	56. Swindon South	87. Corby + East Northamptonshire	116. Welwyn Hatfield
7. Bury North	28. Bridgend	57. Cities of London + Westminster	88. Leeds South West + Morley	117. Hitchin
8. Bolton North East	29. Clwyd North	58. Airdrie + Shotts	89. Hamilton + Clyde Valley	118. Dunbartonshire West
9. Watford	30. Lancaster + Wyre	59. Bolsover	90. Bishop Auckland	119. Bolton West
10. Chingford + Woodford Green	31. Hastings + Rye	60. Shipley	91. Chelsea + Fulham	120. Scunthorpe
11. Wycombe	32. Eltham + Chislehurst	61. Crewe + Nantwich	92. Crawley	121. Erewash
12. Birmingham Northfield	33. Cowdenbeath + Kirkcaldy	62. Loughborough	93. Na h-Eileanan an Iar	122. Bournemouth West
13. Leeds North West	34. Lincoln	63. Midlothian	94. Harrow East	123. Carlisle
14. Stroud	35. Hyndburn	64. Rutherglen	95. South Ribble	124. Edinburgh North + Leith
15. Keighley + Ilkley	36. Broxtowe	65. Tipton + Wednesbury	96. Newcastle-under-Lyme	125. Earley + Woodley
16. Stoke-on-Trent Central	37. Chipping Barnet	66. Rushcliffe	97. Bournemouth East	126. Glenrothes + Mid Fife
17. Whitehaven + Workington	38. Northampton North	67. Norwich North	98. Stevenage	127. Colchester
18. Lothian East	39. Newton Aycliffe + Spennymoor	68. Spenn Valley	99. Motherwell, Wishaw + Carluke	128. Stockton West
19. Gedling	40. Hendon	69. Glasgow South West	100. Glasgow South	129. Edinburgh East + Musselburgh
20. Walsall + Bloxwich	41. Truro + Falmouth	70. Milton Keynes North	101. Wimbledon	130. Hexham
21. Peterborough	42. Wrexham	71. Worcester	102. Camborne + Redruth	131. Ossett + Denby Dale
	43. Hull West + Haltemprice	72. Glasgow North	103. Inverclyde + Renfrewshire West	132. Middlesbrough South + East Cleveland
	44. Blackpool South	73. Rother Valley	104. Stoke-on-Trent North	133. Dwyfor Meirionnydd
	45. Calder Valley	74. Southport	105. Gloucester	134. Doncaster East + the Isle of Axholme
	46. Milton Keynes Central	75. Ashfield	106. Finchley + Golders Green	135. Great Grimsby + Cleethorpes
	47. Southampton Itchen	76. Shrewsbury	107. York Outer	136. Pendle + Clitheroe
	48. Clwyd East	77. Worthing East + Shoreham	108. Rossendale + Darwen	137. Paisley + Renfrewshire South
	49. Glasgow North East	78. Caerfyrddin	109. Wolverhampton North East	138. Basingstoke
	50. Ceredigion Preseli	79. Penistone + Stocksbridge	110. Macclesfield	139. Bathgate + Linlithgow
		80. Barrow + Furness		140. Dover + Deal
		81. Colne Valley		141. Penrith + Solway
				142. Cumbernauld + Kirkintilloch
				143. Telford
				144. Paisley + Renfrewshire North
				145. Buckingham + Bletchley
				146. Morecambe + Lunesdale
				147. Derbyshire North East
				148. Rugby
				149. Croydon South
				150. Bassetlaw

Winning all seats up Earley + Woodley means Labour majority

Without gains from SNP, Labour must win Bassetlaw to win a majority

Attitudes in the Winning 150 seats

Labour's mountain to climb has become slightly steeper following the boundary changes. A large electoral swing will be required for Labour to gain anything approaching all of these 150 seats. Throughout 2024, it will be important to remember just what a transformation in voting behaviour is required at the forthcoming election, even for Labour to secure a majority of one.

However, as we head into the final few months of this Parliament, new Fabian Society-YouGov polling confirms that significant progress has been made, especially in the Winning 150 marginals. If the poll results for these possible target seats were replicated in a general election tomorrow, Labour would likely secure a convincing victory.

Voting intention

	GB 2019 election	GB 2024 poll	GB change %	W150 2019 election	W150 2024 poll	W150 change
Conservative	44%	22%	-22%	44%	18%	-26%
Labour	32%	46%	+14%	34%	52%	+18%
Lib Dem	12%	8%	-4%	8%	4%	-4%
Reform	2%	12%	+10%	2%	11%	+9%
Green	3%	6%	+3%	2%	5%	+3%
SNP	4%	3%	-1%	7%	5%	-2%
Plaid Cymru	1%	1%	0%	1%	2%	+1%

Note: Reform contested the 2019 election as the Brexit Party, and did not stand in seats that were then Conservative-held.

Looking at Great Britain overall, in this poll Labour leads the Conservatives with 46 per cent of the vote, compared to 22 per cent for the Conservatives. This is a 24 percentage-point lead and is a swing of 17 percentage points compared to 2019.

The Fabian Society has undertaken the first analysis of voting intention in the key 150 marginal constituencies. Looking at those who live in these key target seats, 52 per cent currently intend to vote Labour compared to 18 per cent voting Conservative – a 34 percentage-point lead. This implies a swing of around 22 percentage points to Labour in these marginals since 2019. This is an estimate based on the notional 2019 results calculated by Rallings and Thrasher.

There remains significant uncertainty about whether Labour's polling lead will be as large as this when all the votes are counted. Our poll found 18 per cent of those living in the 150 marginal seats are undecided and a high number said they would vote Reform (and might swing back to the Conservatives). Nevertheless it is notable that Labour has gained more support since 2019 in these possible target seats than across the country as a whole.

Looking specifically at those who voted Conservative in 2019 in the Winning 150 seats, 11 per cent of them now intend to vote Labour. This is particularly damaging for the Conservatives in the seats they hold as here these switches from Conservative to Labour are worth 'double'

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(ie a vote lost by the Conservatives and gained by Labour). Around 21 per cent of 2019 Conservatives are currently intending to vote Reform and 23 per cent currently do not know who they will vote for. Whether these voters stay at home, vote Reform or vote Conservative will be crucial to determining how many of these seats can be won by Labour.

Likelihood of voting Conservative or Labour

	Conservative (Great Britain)	Labour (Great Britain)	Conservative (W150 Seats)	Labour (W150 Seats)
Never consider voting (0 out of 10)	43%	25%	43%	21%
Unlikely to consider voting (1 to 5 out of 10)	26%	26%	29%	27%
Likely to consider voting (6 to 10 out of 10)	26%	45%	21%	48%
Don't know	5%	5%	6%	6%

Question: On a scale of 0 to 10, where 0 means you would never consider voting for them, and 10 means you would definitely consider voting for them, how likely are you to consider voting for the following parties at the next general election?

We also asked survey respondents about their likelihood of voting Conservative or Labour. Across Great Britain, just one in four (26 per cent) are likely to vote Conservative (ie saying the likelihood of doing so was between 6 and 10 out of 10) compared to 45 per cent saying the same about Labour. Even more concerning for the Conservatives, 43 per cent of adults in Great Britain say they would never consider voting Conservative (ie stating their likelihood of doing so is 0 out of 10), compared to just 25 per cent saying the same for Labour

Looking specifically at respondents in the 150 key marginals, 21 per cent would be likely to vote Conservative – compared to 48 per cent likely to vote Labour (ie a likelihood between 6 and 10 out of 10). Forty-three per cent of respondents say they would never consider voting Conservative. Just over a fifth (21 per cent) in the marginals say the same about Labour. Only 56 per cent of those who voted Conservative in 2019 in the marginal constituencies would be likely to vote for the Conservatives at the next election (ie a likelihood between 6 and 10 out of 10).

Most preferred government

	Great Britain	Winning 150 Seats
A Labour government led by Keir Starmer	39%	39%
A Conservative government led by Rishi Sunak	17%	14%
Neither	30%	30%
Not sure	14%	17%

Question: After the next general election, which of the following outcomes would you prefer?

When asked which outcome is preferred following the next general election, 39 per cent across Great Britain said a Labour government led by Keir Starmer – compared to 17 per cent saying

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a Conservative government led by Rishi Sunak. The proportion saying ‘neither’ was 30 per cent and 14 per cent said ‘not sure’.

In the Winning 150 seats, 39 per cent would prefer a Labour government led by Keir Starmer after the next election. This proportion is more than double those who said they would prefer a Conservative government led by Rishi Sunak (14 per cent). Indeed, a Conservative government led by Rishi Sunak was the least selected option in the key marginals – with 30 per cent selecting ‘neither’ and 17 per cent selecting ‘not sure’.

Just 39 per cent of those who voted Conservative in 2019 in the marginal seats said they would prefer a Conservative government led by Rishi Sunak as the outcome of the next election – compared to 13 per cent saying a Labour government led by Keir Starmer, 39 per cent saying ‘neither’ and 17 per cent said ‘not sure’.

Tackling the cost of living

	Great Britain	Winning 150 Seats
Conservatives much/slightly better than Labour	21%	17%
They would be much be the same	26%	23%
Labour much/slightly better than Conservatives	36%	39%
Not sure	17%	20%

Question: Out of Labour and the Conservatives, which political party, if any, do you think would handle tackling the cost of living best, or would they be much the same? Results for x party would be ‘much better’ and ‘slightly better’ are presented together.

For many voters, the cost of living crisis is one of the most important issues facing the country.⁴ While we are still many months away from polling day, it is likely to remain a key defining issue.

When asked which political party, if any, would be better at tackling the cost of living, more respondents in Great Britain overall selected Labour (36 per cent) than Conservative (21 per cent). Around a quarter (26 per cent) said both parties would be much the same – and 17 per cent were not sure.

A slightly larger proportion of respondents in the 150 key non-Labour marginals think Labour would be better at tackling the cost of living crisis (39 per cent) than the Conservatives (17 per cent) compared to Great Britain overall. Just under a quarter (23 per cent) said both parties would be the same – and a fifth (20 per cent) were not sure.

Endnotes

¹ Baker, C, Uberoi, E and Johnston, N. Boundary review 2023: Which seats will change in the UK?, 2023. ² Estimates compiled by Professors Colin Rallings and Michael Thrasher on behalf of BBC News, ITV News, Sky News and the Press Association, 16 January 2023,

³ Rallings, C. and Thasher, M. The electoral impact of the new parliamentary constituency boundaries, 16 January 2023.

⁴ More in Common, MIC VI and top issues – Jan 2024. 2056 adults in Great Britain, 9 January to 11 January 2024.