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ORIGINAL ARTICLE

United Kingdom: Political developments and data in 2025. Navigating choppy waters

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Abstract

2025 marked the first full year of the Starmer Government and was characterised by the continued pressure of immigration on national politics, alongside the success of Reform UK at the local elections. A full Cabinet reshuffle took place after Deputy Prime Minister Angela Rayner resigned in September. Rebellion over proposed benefit reforms led to a government U-turn in July and the UK asserted its place on the international stage through the formal recognition of the state of Palestine as well as helping shape the Coalition of the Willing to assist with the Russia-Ukraine conflict. However, this was overshadowed by controversy surrounding Peter Mandelson, the British Ambassador to the US, and his resignation from the post.

Keywords: United Kingdom; immigration; cabinet; parliament

Introduction

After the landslide Labour victory of July 2024, 2025 represented the first full year of Sir Keir Starmer's administration. Despite the scale of the election victory, both the party and their leader struggled to cut through in the polls. With the Conservative Party still in recovery after their election defeat, Nigel Farage's Reform UK took the lead in opinion polls from March. As such, immigration was one of the key policy areas characterising politics in the United Kingdom this year, but the Labour Government also had to contend with a rebellion against planned changes to benefits, leading to a government U-turn. The UK's place on the world stage was also under scrutiny in 2025, with on-going efforts to maintain the Special Relationship with the US, alongside continued support for Ukraine and the formal recognition of a Palestinian state in efforts to promote a lasting solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Starmer had made some minor changes to his team at the start of September, but the resignation of Angela Rayner just days later triggered a wide-ranging Cabinet reshuffle, that saw some substantial movement between senior ministerial roles and the re-entry of Douglas Alexander, a minister between 2006 and 2007 under Tony Blair. A new leftwing political party, Your Party was launched, and former Labour MP Zarah Sultana became their first MP in November. The first by-election of the Starmer Government saw a safe Labour seat lost to Reform UK, emphasising the on-going struggle the government faced in the opinion polls.

Election report

There were no national elections in the UK in 2025.

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Cabinet report

The current government took office on 5 July 2024 and is a single-party majority government. On 1 September, Keir Starmer had made changes to his team at Number 10 and the Cabinet Office, to streamline the running of the Prime Minister's office – this included the appointment of Danny Jones to the new Cabinet role of Chief Secretary to the Prime Minister. Starmer had not planned to make any substantial changes to his Cabinet until later in his term (Adu 2025). However, Deputy Prime Minister and Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government Angela Rayner resigned on 5 September after Sir Laurie Magnus, the Prime Minister's Ethics Advisor, found that she had breached the ministerial code after not seeking recommended tax advice when purchasing a property, and as such, underpaid the tax on her purchase. This, alongside a government trying to gain ground lost to Reform UK, led Starmer to conduct a wide-ranging reshuffle of his Cabinet (Whannel 2025). David Lammy moved from Foreign Secretary to replace Rayner as Deputy Prime Minister, and also became Minister for Justice. Lucy Powell, Leader of the House of Commons returned to the backbenches, and Ian Murray, Secretary of State for Scotland (in 2015–2017 and 2019–2023, he was the party's only Scottish Labour MP) moved to a junior ministerial position. He was replaced by Douglas Alexander, who had previously served in the position under Tony Blair between 2006 and 2007, before losing his seat in 2015, re-entering Parliament in 2024. Emma Reynolds, another former Labour MP who had previously lost their seat and re-entered Parliament in 2024, entered Cabinet for the first time, replacing Steve Reed as Secretary of State for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs. Reed, in turn, took up Rayner's former role as Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government. Shabana Mahmood became Home Secretary, signalling a shift towards a harder approach to immigration. Yvette Cooper, in turn, moved from Home Secretary to fill the gap left by Lammy as Foreign Secretary. With the government U-turn on proposed benefit changes before the Summer recess, Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, Liz Kendall was moved to become Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, and was replaced by Pat McFadden, the current Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, but also a veteran of junior ministerial positions under Blair and Brown, as well as the Labour campaign coordinator for the 2024 General Election. Full changes may be found in Table 1.

Parliament report

The first by-election of the Starmer administration was held on 1 May 2025 in Runcorn and Helsby. This was a new seat, created by the boundary review ahead of the 2024 General Election, but it had been constructed from largely Labour-held seats, and notional results gave Labour a 12 percentage point majority. The incumbent MP for the seat, who had also been an MP since 2017 for one of the former seats making up Runcorn and Helsby, Mike Amesbury, won a 35 percentage point majority at the 2024 election. However, he had ended 2024 sitting as an independent MP with the Labour party whip withdrawn. After assaulting a member of the public, Amesbury had been suspended by the party and was charged with assault. In January 2025, he pleaded guilty and was subsequently sentenced to ten weeks' imprisonment, which became non-custodial on appeal. This would have triggered a recall petition, and there was controversy over Amesbury continuing to receive his MP salary. He stepped down as MP on 10 March, triggering a by-election. Sarah Pochin, a former Conservative parliamentary candidate stood for Reform UK and won the seat from Labour's Karen Shore by six votes. This was the closest by-election result since 1892. Pochin became the first female Reform UK MP and used her maiden speech, which was made during a debate on the Border Security, Asylum and Immigration Bill, to address immigration.

Several Labour MPs had the party whip withdrawn in 2025. Dan Norris, Labour MP for Somerset North East and Hanham was arrested in April for rape and other offences, but refused calls to stand down. Diane Abbott, the first female black MP and Mother of the House was

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Table 1. Cabinet composition of Starmer I in United Kingdom in 2025

Duration of cabinet	Inception	5 July 2024	Dissolution	Still in office at the end of the year
Period covered by table	From	1 January 2025	Until	31 December 2025
Type of cabinet	Single party majority			

A. Party/gender composition on 1 January 2025

	Seats in cabinet		Seats held by women		Seats in parliament	
Party	*N*	%	*N*	% of party	*N*	%
Labour Party	22	100.0	11	50.0	402	61.8
Totals	**22**	**100.0**	**11**	**50.0**	**402**	**61.8**

B. Composition of Starmer I cabinet

See previous editions of the political data yearbook for the United Kingdom or http://politicaldatayearbook.com

C. Changes in composition of Starmer I cabinet during 2025

Ministerial title	Outgoing minister	Date	Incoming minister	Comments
Deputy Prime Minister	Angela Rayner (1980, female, Labour)	5 September 2025	David Lammy (1972, male, Labour)	Resigned after breaching the ministerial code
Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government	Angela Rayner (1980, female, Labour)	5 September 2025	Steve Reed (1963, male, Labour)	Cabinet reshuffle
Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster	Pat McFadden (1965, male, Labour)	6 September 2025	Darren Jones (1986, male, Labour)	Cabinet reshuffle
Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs	David Lammy (1972, male, Labour)	5 September 2025	Yvette Cooper (1969, female, Labour)	Cabinet reshuffle
Secretary of State for the Home Department	Yvette Cooper (1969, female, Labour)	5 September 2025	Shabana Mahmood (1980, female, Labour)	Cabinet reshuffle

(*Continued*)

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Table 1. (*Continued*)

C. Changes in composition of Starmer I cabinet during 2025

Ministerial title	Outgoing minister	Date	Incoming minister	Comments
Secretary of State for Justice	Shabana Mahmood (1980, female, Labour)	5 September 2025	David Lammy (1972, male, Labour)	Cabinet reshuffle
Secretary of State for Work and Pensions	Liz Kendall (1971, female, Labour)	5 September 2025	Pat McFadden (1965, male, Labour)	Cabinet reshuffle
Secretary of State for Business and Trade	Jonathan Reynolds (1980, male, Labour)	5 September 2025	Peter Kyle (1970, male, Labour)	Cabinet reshuffle
Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology	Peter Kyle (1970, male, Labour)	5 September 2025	Liz Kendall (1971, female, Labour)	Cabinet reshuffle
Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs	Steve Reed (1963, male, Labour)	5 September 2025	Emma Reynolds (1977, female, Labour)	Cabinet reshuffle
Secretary of State for Scotland	Ian Murray (1976, male, Labour)	5 September 2025	Douglas Alexander (1967, male, Labour)	Cabinet reshuffle
Leader of the House of Commons	Lucy Powell (1974, female, Labour)	5 September 2025	Alan Campbell (1957, male, Labour)	Cabinet reshuffle

D. Party/gender composition on 31 December 2025

	Seats in cabinet		Seats held by women		Seats in parliament	
Party	*N*	%	*N*	% of party	*N*	%
Labour Party	22	100.0	10	45.0	404	62.2
Totals	**22**	**100.0**	**10**	**45.5**	**404**	**62.2**

Source: UK Parliament (n.d.).

Table 2. Party and gender composition of the House of Commons in United Kingdom in 2025

	1 January 2025				31 December 2025			
	All		Women		All		Women	
Party	*N*	%	*N*	%	*N*	%	*N*	%
Labour	402	61.8	186	46.3	404	62.2	187	46.3
Conservative	121	18.6	29	24.0	119	18.3	29	24.4
Liberal democrats	72	11.1	32	44.4	72	11.1	32	44.4
Scottish national party	9	1.4	1	11.1	9	1.4	1	11.1
Independent	15	2.3	4	26.7	14	2.2	2	14.3
Democratic unionist party	5	0.8	1	20.0	5	0.8	1	20.0
Sinn Féin	7	1.1	2	28.6	7	1.1	2	28.6
Plaid Cymru	4	0.6	3	75.0	4	0.6	3	75.0
Social democratic and labour party	2	0.3	1	50.0	2	0.3	1	50.0
Alliance	1	0.2	1	100.0	1	0.2	1	100.0
Green party	4	0.6	3	75.0	4	0.6	3	75.0
Speaker	1	0.2	0	0.0	1	0.2	0	0.0
Reform UK	5	0.8	0	0.0	5	0.8	1	20.0
Ulster unionist party	1	0.2	0	0.0	1	0.2	0	0.0
Traditional unionist voice	1	0.2	0	0.0	1	0.2	0	0.0
Your party	0	0.0	0	0.0	1	0.2	1	100.0
Totals	**650**	**100.0**	**263**	**40.5**	**650**	**100.0**	**264**	**40.6**

Source: UK Parliament (2025a).

suspended in July after repeating comments on racism that had previously seen her suspended in 2023. Labour sources indicate that she will not regain the party whip (Scott and Allegretti 2025). Of the seven Labour MPs who had had the party whip withdrawn in July 2024 after rebelling against the two-child benefit cap, Richard Burgeon, Ian Byrne, Imran Hussain and Rebecca Long-Bailey had the whip reinstated to them in February. The other three (John McDonnell, Apsana Begum and Zarah Sultana) remained suspended, and in July Sultana announced that she would be leaving Labour to found a new party – Your Party – with former Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn (see below). She became the party's first MP on 18 November. The Labour whip was restored to McDonnell and Begum in July.

One Conservative MP had the party whip withdrawn in 2025 – Patrick Spencer, first elected in 2024 for Suffolk Central and Ipswich North, was charged with sexual assault in May. Danny Kruger, a member of the Shadow Cabinet of both Sunak and Badenoch, defected to Reform UK on 15 September, declaring the Conservatives were 'over' and becoming the first sitting Conservative MP to defect to the party. Reform UK MP James McMurdock permanently resigned the party whip in July after a newspaper investigation revealed questions over loans given to his dormant businesses during the COVID-19 pandemic. Rupert Lowe, Reform UK MP for Great Yarmouth was suspended in March after bullying accusations. He announced at the end of June that he was starting his own right-wing anti-immigration political organisation, Restore Britain, and became the leader, although as the year closed he technically still served as an independent MP. These changes have led to an unusually fragmented House of Commons – indeed it is currently home to the largest ever number of opposition MPs who are not members of the Official Opposition.

Information on the composition of the House of Commons in 2025 can be found in Table 2.

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Table 3. Party and gender composition of the House of Lords in United Kingdom in 2025

	1 January 2025				31 December 2025			
	All		Women		All		Women	
Party	*N*	%	*N*	%	*N*	%	*N*	%
Conservative	271	33.9	67	24.7	281	34.2	72	25.6
Labour	185	23.1	72	38.9	209	25.5	87	41.6
Crossbench	184	23.0	49	26.6	177	21.6	47	26.6
Liberal democrat	78	9.8	32	41.0	75	9.1	31	41.3
Non-affiliated	42	5.2	11	26.2	40	4.9	11	27.5
Bishops	25	3.1	7	28.0	24	2.9	8	33.3
Democratic unionist party	6	0.8	0	0.0	6	0.7	0	0.0
Ulster unionist party	3	0.4	0	0.0	3	0.4	0	0.0
Green party	2	0.2	2	100.0	2	0.2	2	100.0
Plaid Cymru	2	0.2	1	50.0	2	0.2	1	50.0
Conservative independent	1	0.1	0	0.0	1	0.1	0	0.0
Lord speaker	1	0.1	0	0.0	1	0.1	0	0.0
Totals	**800**	**100.0**	**241**	**30.1**	**821**	**100.0**	**259**	**31.5**

Source: UK Parliament (2025b).

House of Lords

During 2025, a Bill to remove hereditary peers from the House of Lords, proposed in the 2024 Labour manifesto, was navigating its way through the chambers, with the Lords offering amendments, which were considered by the Commons in September. The bill entered its final stages as the year closed.

Twenty-five new Labour peers were introduced to the Lords in 2025 (Cabinet Office 2025), partly due to Starmer's desire to balance the chamber away from Conservative dominance ahead of the planned reforms to hereditary peers in the chamber. These new Labour peers included three former and serving Labour councillors, a former Member of the European Parliament, the Mayor of Lewisham and several former advisors. Others represented expertise in a variety of different fields including health, disaster recovery and education. Five new peerages were awarded by the Liberal Democrats, including to former MP Sarah Teather, Mike Dixon, the party's CEO, as well as the former chief of staff to Sir Ed Davey and two of their hereditary peers (enabling them to remain in the Lords despite the planned changes). Three peerages were awarded by the Conservatives, to former Olympic swimmer and campaigner for women's rights in sports, Sharron Davies, long-serving MP John Redwood, who had stood down in 2024, and Simon Heffer, a political commentator. Nigel Farage had written to the Prime Minister in July requesting the ability to appoint Reform UK peers to the Lords, but did not receive a response.

Information on the composition of the House of Lords in 2025 can be found in Table 3.

Political party report

Former Labour MP Zarah Sultana, who had been suspended by the party since July 2024 announced on 3 July that she would be founding a new party with former Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn and several independent MPs (Bloch 2025). The new party was registered with the Electoral Commission on 30 September 2025 under a collective leadership, and Sultana became its first representative in the Commons on 18 November. Details are shown in Table 4.

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Table 4. Changes in political parties in United Kingdom in 2025

A. Party institutional changes in 2025		
Party	Change	Details
Your Party	New party founded and registered	Founded by former Labour MP Zarah Sultana (suspended from Labour since July 2024) together with former Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn and several independent MPs, under a collective leadership. Registered with the Electoral Commission on 30 September 2025. Sultana became the party's first MP on 18 November 2025.
B. Party leadership changes in 2025		
None reported.		

Source: Electoral Commission 2026.

Despite the landslide victory of July 2024, the polling position of Labour throughout 2025 was poor, at 26 per cent in January, falling consistently to 19 per cent by the end of the year. Despite being four percentage points behind Labour in January (YouGov 2025a), which had widened to six points in June, by December the Conservatives were level at 19 per cent with Labour. Reform UK led the polls from April onwards, ending the year with a seven percentage point lead over the government (YouGov 2025b). With five parties within an eleven point range, the polls reflected the fragmented state of politics in the United Kingdom.

For the party leaders, in January only 25 per cent of the public had a favourable opinion of Starmer, declining to just 18 per cent by the end of the year (YouGov 2025c). Kemi Badenoch's fortunes were marginally more favourable, with 18 per cent, with a more favourable opinion by January, raising to 26 per cent in December (YouGov 2025d). Despite the electoral success of Reform UK, Farage remained a similarly divisive figure, with little change to his popularity of 27 per cent over the year (YouGov 2025e).

Institutional change report

There were no major institutional changes made in the United Kingdom in 2025.

Issues in national politics

In a continuation of the past decade in British politics, immigration remained at the centre of political debate in 2025, not least due to the success of Reform UK in the Runcorn and Helsby by-election and the local elections, where they took control of ten councils for the first time and added 677 new councillors to their ranks. The government signed a deal with France in July allowing the ability to return some of those arriving on small boats back to France in exchange for accepting the same number of asylum seekers from France – this was an attempt to undermine the gangs running the boat crossings and removals began in September. There was also a reduction of Skilled Visa jobs, which excluded social care for the first time, and ended the ability of some visa holders to bring dependents into the country. There was a continued move away from the controversial policy of housing asylum seekers in hotels, using military barracks instead (Home Office 2025). The Border Security, Asylum and Immigration Act passed in December, providing enhanced powers for Border Security, including the ability to seize electronic devices from new arrivals. The new Home Secretary, Shabana Mahmood, announced a substantial overhaul of legal immigration and asylum policy in November, extending the time it takes for asylum seekers to gain settled status, and requiring asylum seekers to reconfirm their status every six years.

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The Conservatives sought to reclaim some ground on immigration, with a continued shift to the right and the defection of one sitting MP to Reform UK. Many former Conservative MPs, including former Cabinet ministers Nadine Dorries and David Jones, also defected to the Reform UK party. Conservative leader Kemi Badenoch spoke of the need for integration and the damaging impact immigration has on communities. She spoke out in defence of Robert Jenrick (Aikman and Walker 2025), the Shadow Justice Secretary, in October, when a secret recording of him remarking on the lack of integration in Birmingham, and not seeing 'another white face' emerged.

Conflicts on the international stage also continued to shape British politics in 2025. The government remained committed to supporting Ukraine in the on-going conflict with Russia. A summit of international leaders in London led to the announcing by Starmer of a 'Coalition of the Willing' on 2 March (Wong 2025) – an initiative bringing together 34 countries to help facilitate negotiations between Ukraine and Russia and ensure any resolution to the conflict is lasting. In June, Defence Secretary John Healey announced the intention to create a Multinational Force Ukraine from the members of the Coalition of the Willing. New Foreign Secretary Yvette Cooper also visited Ukraine in September. Along with France and Canada, in July the UK Government condemned Israeli actions preventing humanitarian aid reaching Gaza, suspending talks on a free trade deal. Also in July, the group Palestine Action were classified as a terrorist organisation after members of the group broke into an RAF base and damaged two planes. By the end of the year almost 3,000 individuals had been arrested after participating in protests in support of the group. The Starmer Government took a historic decision and formally recognised the state of Palestine on 21 September in support of a two-state solution to the conflict.

In December 2024, Starmer had appointed Peter Mandelson to become the British Ambassador to the United States. Mandelson, a former spin doctor, Labour MP, Cabinet minister and European Commissioner for Trade attended Trump's inauguration and attempted to consolidate closer relations over the course of the year. However, in September, papers and emails relating to convicted sex offender Jeffrey Epstein were released by the US House Oversight Committee. These demonstrated a long-lasting close friendship between Mandelson and Epstein, which had continued after Epstein's 2008 conviction for soliciting prostitution involving a minor. Amid much controversy, Mandelson refused to resign, and Starmer sacked him on 11 September.

Domestically, the economy was under pressure from the international environment, and the Chancellor Rachel Reeves was under pressure to deliver the growth promised at the General Election; the government confirmed in January that she would serve in her current role until the next election, in an attempt to quell rumours around her replacement. Planned reforms to the benefits system, which would particularly increase the threshold for disability payments in an attempt to make substantial savings had proved to be particularly controversial among Labour backbenchers, and when it became clear that a substantial rebellion was likely, the government made multiple concessions (Stacey and Walker 2025), holding off on many of the planned changes. In the same week, the Chancellor made headlines when she was seen to cry when sitting on the frontbench, although it later emerged this was due to a 'personal matter' (Mason, Pike and Zeffman 2025). The Budget in the Autumn saw the freezing of income tax thresholds, the removal of green levies from energy bills, and rises in the minimum wage and state pensions. However, the economy grew by just 0.1 per cent in the final quarter as 2025 drew to a close.

Data availability statement. The data for this article can be found at the PDY Interactive website: www.politicaldatayearbook.com

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