

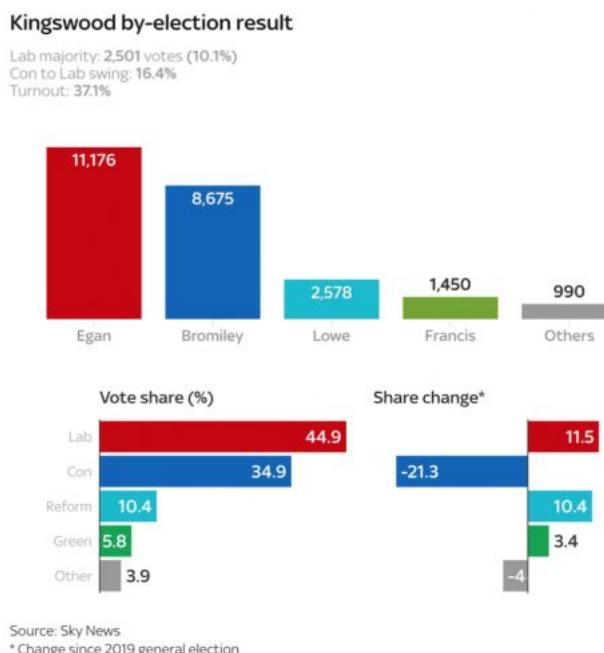
Funding the Future

A devastating night for the Tories

Published: January 12, 2026, 10:49 pm

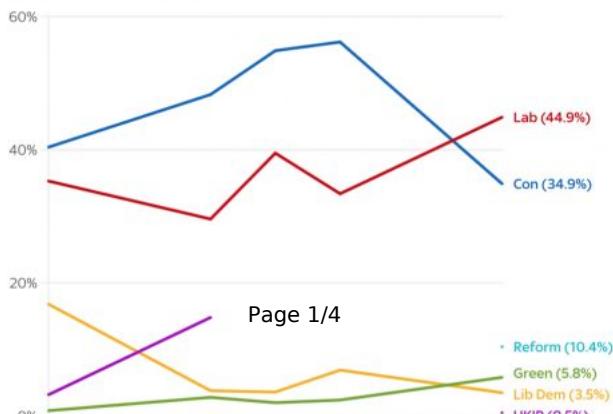
It could be argued that my suggestion that we have seen peak Labour, [made yesterday](#) was either premature or wrong given the overnight by-election results that saw the party make two impressive gains.

In Kingswood the swing was significant in a seat being contested for the last time as it will disappear at the general election:



Labour achieved a swing of 16.4% against the Conservatives in Kingswood

Vote shares in elections since 2010



Five things stood out here.

One was a tactical, albeit small, switch from LibDems to Labour.

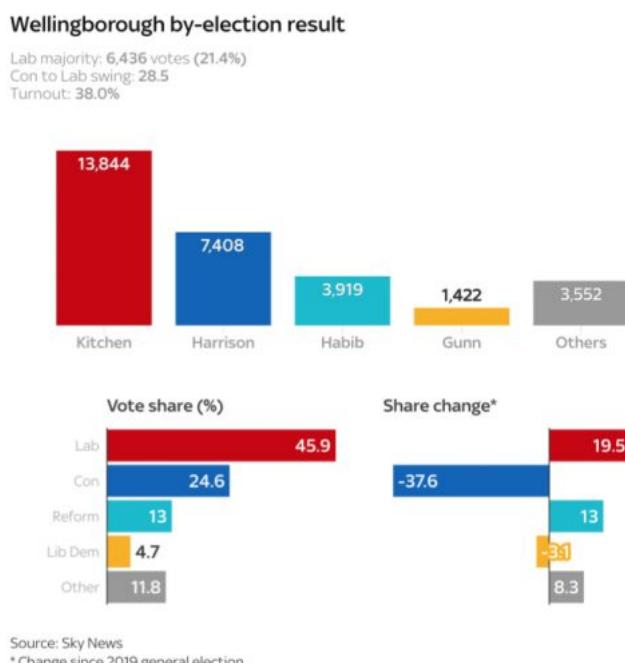
Another was the rise in the Green vote. I suspect that those who cannot stomach Labour went there.

Third, Reform did well, but nowhere near as well as UKIP did in 2015.

Fourth, the combined Tory and Reform vote could have beaten Labour, just.

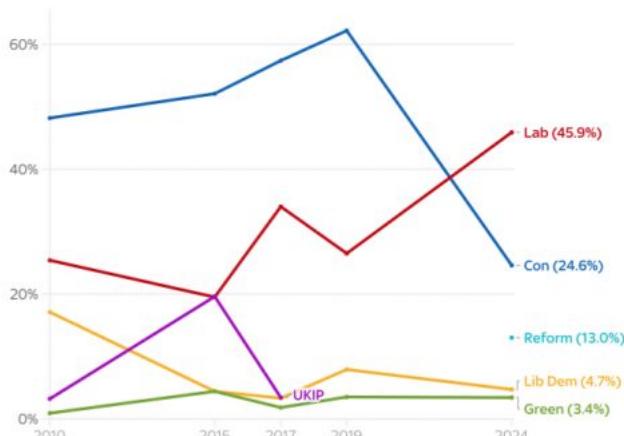
Fifth, there was a substantial swing to Labour.

In Wellingborough this was the story:



Labour achieved a swing from the Conservatives of 28.5% in Wellingborough

Vote shares in elections since 2010



The Tory collapse here was spectacular. Selecting the partner of the former disgraced MP was clearly not a good idea by the local Tories.

Reform still did worse than UKIP in 2015.

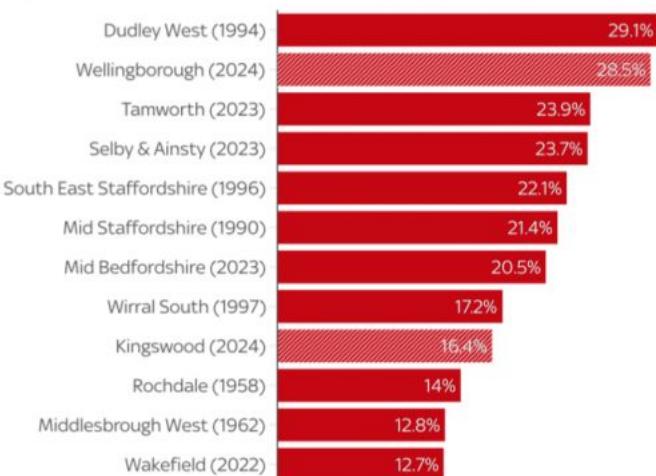
Again, there seems to have been a slight LibDem to Labour swing.

The Greens did not gain from Labour.

The swing to Labour was almost a record:

Many of Labour's biggest post-war by-election gains have taken place since 2019

Biggest Conservative swings to Labour at by-elections since 1945



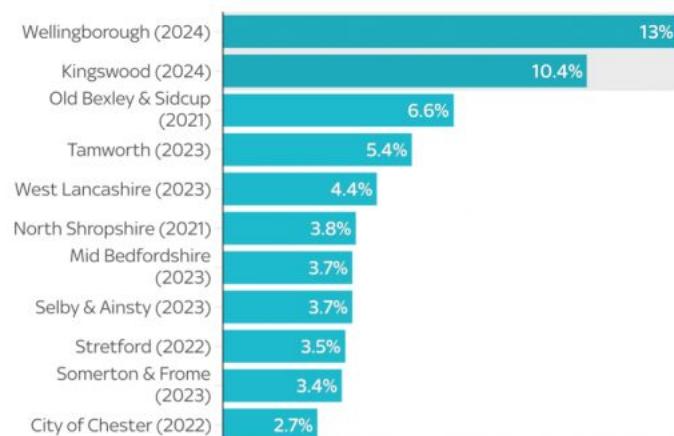
Source: House of Commons

That so many of these large swings are recent is very telling.

The share secured by Reform was a record:

Reform's results in Wellingborough and Kingswood are their highest ever vote shares in by-elections

Vote shares for Reform UK in by-elections



Source: Sky News

Note, however, comments made above about these performances compared to UKIP.

So,, what to think?

First these are by-election results. They are not good indicators of general election outcomes. Turnouts were, predictably, quite low. With double the number voting in a general election things might be very different.

Second, the apathy vote might have been usual indifference. It could also have been a deliberate statement. We just don't know. But, if the Question Time audience was anything to go by that last night, 'a curse on all your houses' might be the sentiment. That said, they were as contemptuous of right wing sentiment as is now commonly the case these days and when Lucy Powell for Labour got surprisingly angry with the Tory on grounds of Tory sleaze the audience very much seemed to like it.

Third, even if these are by-elections and special circumstances apply in both cases, any pretence that the Tories can win the general election must be shattered.

Fourth, Labour will be smug. They have no reason to be given the fiasco heading their way in two weeks.

Fifth, Reform is proving there is a hardcore right wing vote willing to split the right wing.

Sixth, on the left voters are being more tactical. As a result, conclusions for the LibDems and Greens are hard to call.

So, was I wrong? I cannot tell. I might have been. Equally those constituencies were subject to odd situations. In Wellingborough a disgraced MP was replaced by his partner. That was absurd. In Kingswood the former Tory MP quit in disgust with his party. It wasn't a compelling vote of support for the replacement candidate.

The answer is, we must wait and see.