

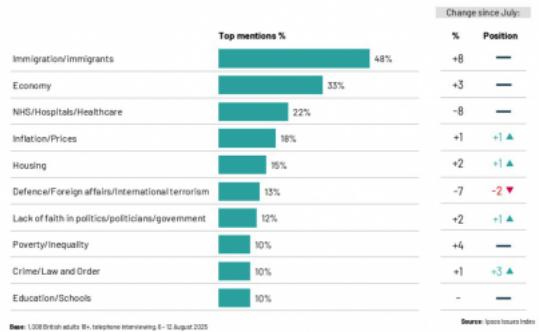
Funding the Future

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According to an opinion poll survey undertaken by [Ipsos Mori](#) in August, immigration is the biggest concern for people in the UK:

Immigration continues to be seen as the top issue facing the country, with concern up since July.
What do you see as the most/other important issues facing Britain today?



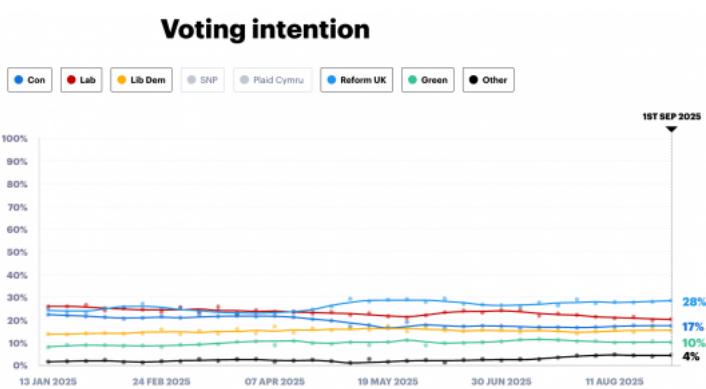
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There is a curious dimension to this poll. Concern about immigration was up 8%. Concerns about the NHS was down 8%. It would appear that people flipped.

Meanwhile, [YouGov's voting intention tracker](#) shows this:



Reform is gaining as a consequence of making immigration a matter of greater concern than the NHS. This seems to be the obvious thing to conclude, albeit that I accept that

drawing obvious inferences from such polls is not always wise.

But, does this flipping of opinion and increased support for Reform make sense?

The [Reform UK](#) manifesto for the 2024 general election set out its supposed “critical reforms” for the NHS. Amongst them were these supposed policy measures:

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Zero basic rate tax for all NHS and social care staff for three years.

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20% tax relief on all private healthcare and insurance.

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A voucher scheme for private treatment when NHS waiting times are exceeded.

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Expanded use of private and overseas healthcare capacity.

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Operating theatres must be open on weekends.

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All NHS Private Finance Contracts to be reviewed for significant savings potential.

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Charge those who fail to attend medical appointments without notice.

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Save A&E by cutting waiting times with a campaign of ‘Pharmacy First, GP Second, A&E Last’.

Let me be clear about what this means.

First, treating tax as optional for NHS staff alone is profoundly wrong. Tax is not a perk. It is the foundation of government economic management. It is how we redistribute income. It is how the government regulates inflation. And it is critical within the fiscal cycle that funds public services, even though it itself does not do so.

In that case, to suggest, as Reform does, that NHS staff can be exempted from tax is to pretend that tax is some sort of contractual extra that can be gifted and withdrawn at whim. And this policy would be exactly that: it would be temporary, insecure, and subject to the politics of the moment. NHS staff would be made more vulnerable, not less, because their incomes would be at the mercy of politicians deciding whether to maintain a tax break. That is no incentive at all: pay is what matters, and not tax gimmicks.

Second, cutting taxes in this way would reduce the overall capacity to fund the NHS,

even though it is initially paid for with funds created by the Bank of England. In that case, the Reform proposal would deliberately undermine the very service it claims to support. At the same time, it would create distortions in the tax system, inviting special pleading from countless other groups who would demand the same treatment. The coherence of tax — as a universal obligation of citizenship — would collapse, but maybe that is Reform's aim.

Third, the promise of vouchers and tax relief for private medical insurance is simply a diversion of resources into the private sector. That is not costless. Private providers recruit their staff from the NHS. They do not train almost any of their own workforce. Subsidising them with government-created money would drain both funds and people from the NHS. Waiting times in the public system will grow longer as a result, making the voucher scheme self-fulfilling: starve the NHS, then pay the private sector to fill the gaps.

Fourth, charges on patients who do not attend will penalise parents of children and pensioners the most, since they have more NHS appointments than any other group in society, and most often they also have the smallest capacity to pay.

The other issues are simply wallpaper: they make no sense.

The overall outcome would be to increase costs. Running parallel systems — one public, one a subsidised private arrangement — is always more expensive. The United States proves that. And when revenues are simultaneously cut by unnecessary tax reliefs, the inevitable consequence is that resources for the NHS will shrink, not grow. The result is that real issues were ignored by Reform whilst diversionary policies were promoted. Amongst the missed issues were:

- * Rising obesity, diabetes and cancer cases, and their causes.
- * The 'brain drain' out of the NHS due to staff shortages, creating unreasonable demands on remaining staff.
- * The problems of GP services and their underfunding meaning that there is serious unemployment among GPs despite the demand for appointments.
- * The failure to tackle the underlying problems creating long-term chronic conditions, including the growing prevalence of ultra-processed food.
- * The difficulties in our dental services, and the loss of NHS dental care for many.
- * And much more.

The consequences of these failures are obvious.

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NHS staff would be made insecure by temporary gimmicks instead of being given the permanent pay rises they need.

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The tax system would be weakened, reducing government capacity to manage the economy.

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The NHS would lose both funds and people to the private sector.

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Inequalities in access would widen as wealthier patients gained subsidised private care while others faced lengthening waits.

This is not reform, however it is looked at. It is dismantling the NHS in plain sight.

What is needed instead is equally clear:

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Fair, permanent pay settlements for NHS staff, not tax holidays.

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Stable and sufficient revenues for the NHS, not deliberate cuts through tax relief for private medicine intended to undermine it.

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Investment in public capacity, not subsidies for private providers.

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A reaffirmation of the principle that healthcare is a collective public good, provided on the basis of need.

Reform's proposals are a Trojan horse for privatisation. They undermine the tax system, reduce NHS resources, and leave both staff and patients more vulnerable. That is not reform. That is betrayal.

The question is, why would people fall for this? And would they really sacrifice the NHS for control of a migration problem that has little or no impact on most people in the UK?

Action points

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Write to your MP and demand that NHS staff are given fair pay, not insecure tax gimmicks.

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Oppose any policy that offers tax relief for private medical insurance — it weakens both the tax system and the NHS.

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Challenge Reform's voucher scheme: it is privatisation by stealth, and it will drain the NHS of funds and staff.

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Call for investment in NHS capacity — hospitals, training, and pay — as the only

sustainable way to reduce waiting lists.

For more on this issue, follow and support the **EveryDoctor campaign. I do.**

Taking further action

If you want to write a letter to your MP on the issues raised in this blog post, there is a ChatGPT prompt to assist you in doing so, with full instructions, [**here**](#).

One word of warning, though: please ensure you have the correct MP. ChatGPT can get it wrong.

Comments

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