



The United Kingdom's 2024 Election

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The center-left Labour Party won the [general election](#) held in the United Kingdom (UK) on July 4, 2024. With 34% of the vote, Labour [won](#) 411 seats in the 650-seat House of Commons (lower house of Parliament), a gain of 209 seats compared with the previous election in 2019. Party leader Keir Starmer became the UK's new prime minister on July 5, 2024.

Labour's victory ended a 14-year run of government led by the center-right Conservative Party, a period that included five different prime ministers over the last eight years. The Conservatives received 24% of the vote and won 121 seats, a decrease of 244 seats compared with the 2019 election and the party's worst election result since it was founded nearly 200 years ago. A number of factors [eroded public support](#) for the Conservatives, including a [sluggish economy](#), the [rising cost of living](#), and the perceived [decline of public services](#) including the National Health Service (NHS). Additionally, the right-wing, populist Reform UK party, which won 14% of the vote and five seats, [attracted support](#) from disillusioned former Conservative voters.

The Liberal Democrats won 12% of the vote and 72 seats, a gain of 61 and the party's [best result](#) in a century. The Scottish National Party [dropped](#) from 48 to 9 seats amid a period of internal turmoil and an investigation into party finances. Eight other political parties and six independent candidates (plus the politically-neutral Speaker of the Commons) won the remaining 32 seats.

In his first [speech](#) as prime minister, Starmer spoke of national renewal and restoring faith in politics and public service. Labour's [campaign](#) priorities included boosting economic growth, developing clean energy, combating crime, improving the education system, and reforming the NHS. Some analysts [observe](#) that since Starmer became Labour Party leader in 2020, he has shifted the party's policy positions from the left toward [the center](#).

The Conservatives' tenure in government was defined to a large extent by the party's support for *Brexit*, the UK's withdrawal from the European Union (EU) in 2020 following a national referendum in 2016. While ruling out rejoining the EU, Labour leaders are seeking to [improve UK-EU relations](#) and negotiate new agreements on trade and security.

Issues for Congress

For decades, U.S. Administrations and many Members of Congress have [viewed](#) the UK as the United States' closest and most reliable ally. This perception stems from factors including a sense of shared

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history, values, and culture; a large and mutually beneficial [economic relationship](#); and extensive cooperation on foreign policy and security issues.

Although analysts [expect](#) a high degree of continuity in most aspects of UK foreign policy under the new Labour government, Members of Congress may wish to monitor post-election developments with regard to U.S.-UK cooperation on numerous global issues. Areas of potential interest may include the following:

- **NATO and Defense Cooperation.** The UK remains a leading country in NATO and heads NATO's Enhanced Forward Presence battlegroup in Estonia. The UK had the world's sixth-highest defense expenditure in 2023, spending \$74.9 billion. At 2.3% of gross domestic product (GDP), the UK's defense spending exceeds the target agreed to by NATO members of spending at least 2% of GDP on defense. Some [observers](#) nonetheless express concern that the UK armed forces lack the size and capabilities needed to effectively meet security challenges. Prime Minister Starmer has pledged to increase defense spending to 2.5% of GDP.
- **Ukraine.** Behind the United States and Germany, the UK is the [third-largest](#) donor of bilateral [assistance to Ukraine](#) since Russia's 2022 invasion. Relations between Russia and the UK are especially tense; the UK government's 2023 foreign and defense policy [review](#) described Russia as "the most acute threat to the UK's security." Labour leaders have [stated](#) that there will be no change in the UK's support for Ukraine and that their commitment to Ukraine is "ironclad."
- **Indo-Pacific.** The 2023 review additionally states that "China poses an epoch-defining challenge to the type of international order we want to see." The UK has been increasing its engagement in the Indo-Pacific region in an effort to counter China's influence. New Foreign Secretary David Lammy [wrote](#) in 2023 that a Labour government would conduct a full audit of UK-China relations and base its strategy toward China on "three Cs: compete, challenge and, where we can, cooperate."
- **AUKUS.** In 2021, Australia, the UK, and the United States announced the creation of an enhanced trilateral security partnership, called AUKUS. Under AUKUS, the three countries plan to [develop shared military capabilities](#) and deepen interoperability, and the UK and Australia (with U.S. assistance) plan to build a new class of nuclear-powered attack [submarines](#).
- **Israel-Hamas Conflict.** Prime Minister Starmer has [advocated](#) for a ceasefire in Gaza, increased humanitarian aid, and the return of hostages held by Hamas. He has [stated](#) an intention to "work with international partners towards the recognition of a Palestinian state as part of a negotiated, just and lasting peace" but has asserted that his government would not [unilaterally recognize](#) a Palestinian state outside of a negotiated peace process.
- **U.S.-UK Economic Relationship.** In 2023, the United States and the UK [announced](#) the Atlantic Declaration for a Twenty-First Century U.S.-UK Economic Partnership. The declaration sets out plans for deepening U.S.-UK cooperation on critical and emerging technologies, supply chain security, digital transformation, clean energy, defense, health security, and space. Legislation introduced in the 118th Congress (H.R. 3653/S. 629) would authorize the President to negotiate and enter into a comprehensive trade agreement with the UK.
- **Northern Ireland.** Post-Brexit trade and customs arrangements have elicited strong objections from some in the unionist (pro-British) community of [Northern Ireland](#) (part of the UK). Unionist opposition led to a nearly two-year delay in establishing a new devolved government after elections in 2022. Efforts by the former UK government to [address](#) the objections helped alleviate tensions, with the devolved government restored

- in early 2024. Many Members of Congress have expressed an enduring interest in peace and stability in Northern Ireland (see, for example, S.Res. 157, adopted by unanimous consent in the Senate in 2023).

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