

# General election 2024 (Britain): Sunak throws the dice

Sunday 26 May 2024, by [KELLAWAY Dave](#) (Date first published: 23 May 2024).

## Dave Kellaway reacts to the Sunak's surprise call for a July 4<sup>th</sup> election

### Contents

- [Why has Sunak gambled?](#)
- [Racism and Reform](#)
- [The Labour corporate bandwagon](#)
- [Fighting alternatives](#)

Sometimes the beginning contains the end. 'Drowning Street' and 'Things can only get wetter' were among the headlines in the newspapers the day after Rishi Sunak's announcement of the July 4<sup>th</sup> general election. He hoped for gravitas and drama that could somehow jolt the polls. Instead, he stood there getting completely pissed on. His voice was drowned out by an anti-Brexit protester broadcasting the 1997 Blair anthem, Things will only get better. It is almost as though his team hung him out to dry (or rather to get drenched). Was there really no staffer who knew that the police cannot stop you playing loud music at the bottom of Downing Street? Nobody to even hold an umbrella for the leader? All this expresses his isolation and the dire state of the Tory party as well as a complete lack of political nous.

A few minutes later you had Keir Starmer looking composed and prime ministerial in front of not just one, but two Union Jacks. He gave an intelligible, brisk speech summed up in the word on the rostrum - Change. Labour is not really going to change much but it does not look like it will lose the marketing campaign. Sunak's excruciating performance was a bit like watching West Ham smashed last week - you knew the game was up when Man City's Foden scored within two minutes. Nobody doubted the inevitable, City was going to win the league. Images count in elections where most voters get their news from the TV and non-print media.

---

"Sunak's excruciating performance was a bit like watching West Ham smashed last week - you knew the game was up when Man City's Foden scored within two minutes. Nobody doubted the inevitable, City was going to win the league. Images count in elections where most voters get their news from the TV and non-print media."

---

## **Why has Sunak gambled?**

Most commentators (including myself) were certain that he would hang on until November. The local elections and the running opinion polls currently indicate a big Tory defeat. Knowing he was going to lose anyway, why not complete the two years, at least being at the centre of things? The economic indicators could have got better, something else might have turned up. Incumbent Prime Ministers tend to hang on to the last minute.

Perhaps, like a desperate poker player, he thought by going all in he could create some chaos in the political situation and disrupt the planning of the other parties. Make himself stand out; look I am not cautious, nerdy Rishi, I am the swashbuckler, the man who is daring to take on all comers against the odds. Except he is no Boris Johnson and Brexit is no longer a card that can be played against Labour. Surely, he knows the game is up for the Tories but he thinks this unexpected move will minimise the losses.

## **Racism and Reform**

Sunak may feel the Rwanda racist policy against migrants will play better early on if he can get at least one flight away. If the policy gets mired in lots of legal challenges later in the year, then it looks even more of a mess than it already does. Other crises are also incoming, like the bankruptcy of Thames Water which could involve billions of government bailout money. Some pundits have speculated that the Tories are so desperate that they are hoping that the English football team will still be in the Euros football tournament on July 4<sup>th</sup> - in the quarter finals - so the government may benefit from a feel-good factor. Clutching at straws...

The local elections showed that Farage's Reform Party will take significant votes from the Tories. There will be no alliance like in 2019. Organisationally, Reform is still fragile and is still in the process of finding candidates, raising enough cash and so on. By going now, maybe the Tories think it makes it more difficult for Reform. It puts Farage in a corner. He seemed to be reluctant to take the helm of the Reform campaign despite the entreaties of its leader Richard Tice. A Farage-led campaign would boost the Reform vote.

---

“The local elections and the running opinion polls currently indicate a big Tory defeat. Knowing he was going to lose anyway, why not complete the two years, at least being at the centre of things? The economic indicators could have got better, something else might have turned up. Incumbent Prime Ministers tend to hang on to the last minute.”

---

A major reason for the July election date appears to be that inflation increasing less quickly at just

over 2% will be enough to show Sunak's plan is working, notwithstanding that the fall in energy prices is nothing to do with the government. In fact, inflation in leisure and hospitality is still running at 6%. The IMF has publicly warned the government against more tax cuts, and this was going to be part of the offer going into November. All the polls show that Tories are behind Labour on economic competence. Falling inflation does not erase the huge effects of the ongoing cost of living crisis with soaring rents and mortgages. People link Liz Truss's disastrous interlude with what has happened to their budgets. Governments, particularly after 14 years in office, lose elections before the election campaign has even started. People also do not forget the trauma of the Covid pandemic and Johnson's callous irresponsibility.

Did Sunak go early to the polls to head off a no confidence leadership challenge? If this was going to happen it would have been straight after the local election defeats. However, you can detect a certain exasperation Sunak has with all the jostling to replace him post-election. I am going out with a band, sod the lot of them. Let them all get on with it, I am off to make more money in California. Is his disruptive move as much about making mischief amongst the Tory factions as really disturbing the Labour opposition? Maybe he thinks that the leadership campaigns will be put on hold during the election campaign. Some hope.

### **The Labour corporate bandwagon**

Certainly, there are no signs that Labour has been thrown off guard. It held its campaign launch last week with the six first steps card. Although its right-wing shift and witch-hunt against the left have driven out tens of thousands of activists it has already accumulated an electoral war chest. A deal over the watered down (but not further watered down) labour laws proposals has kept the union money tap on. Corporate donors are falling over one another to get on the Labour bandwagon. Labour can win easily even without a Corbyn-era army of canvassers.

Starmer still has one of the lowest personal ratings as an opposition leader going into a general election, but this is as much to do with his ditching of radical policies that can enthuse voters as much as any personality issues. The whole Labour strategy of letting the Tories lose the election has worked so far and seems to be continuing. There are less expectations about this Labour party than we saw in 1997 with Blair.

---

“The whole Labour strategy of letting the Tories lose the election has worked so far and seems to be continuing. There are less expectations about this Labour party than we saw in 1997 with Blair.”

---

For the left, the July 4<sup>th</sup> election means we will have a chance of engaging more people in political discussion and action since elections always make politics a bit more relevant for people who usually do not bother with it given the lack of alternatives on offer with a biased two-party system. We have to join with everyone who is organising to kick out the Tories. And we keep up the struggles and organise the resistance. For example, we can put Palestine and the ecological crisis at the centre of

the debate. The Labour apparatus just wants people to canvass around their vanilla six first steps. We should maintain Palestine solidarity actions – one obvious demand to put on Labour is for it to follow Norway, Spain and Ireland in recognising a Palestinian state. The big June 22<sup>nd</sup> ecological demonstration should be maintained and built even bigger.

## **Fighting alternatives**

Already, there are initiatives by Momentum and others to have mass debates about the radical policies that a Labour government should be implementing. Activists inside and outside Labour can join in together. We can support the electoral campaigns of people on the Labour left like John McDonnell, Zarah Sultana and Faisa Shaheen. Credible left candidates outside Labour can also contribute to building the movement we need to hold Labour to account and to fight for a socialist alternative. Expect a vicious racist and “anti-woke” war by the Tories; the left needs to step up its defence of the oppressed against this onslaught.

Fighting for a socialist alternative does not mean that we think that there is no difference between a tame Starmer government and another harder right Tory government. If you think there is no difference just imagine waking up on July 5<sup>th</sup> facing five more years of increasingly repressive laws, restrictions on strikes, racist expulsions of migrants and vicious spending cuts.

Under Labour, there will be more space for organising and crucially the organic links between the trade union movement and the party means our struggles and campaigns can have a different impact. Some of the official manifesto policies on the unions or green energy can be a focus for much more radical action and proposals. A Tory manifesto will have no such starting points for action.

There is a well-known poem by Stevie Smith entitled “Not Waving but Drowning.” Yesterday Sunak was certainly drowning. We can wave him and his Tories away on July 4<sup>th</sup>.

**Dave Kellaway**

---

**P.S.**

- Anti\*Capitalist Resistance. 23 May 2024:  
<https://anticapitalistresistance.org/sunak-throws-the-dice/>
- Dave Kellaway is on the Editorial Board of Anti\*Capitalist Resistance, a member of Socialist Resistance, and Hackney and Stoke Newington Labour Party, a contributor to International Viewpoint and Europe Solidaire Sans Frontieres.