

Brexit - 5 years on

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Outline

- Introduction
- The UK's Perspective: What Changed?
 - Political context
 - Sovereignty
 - Economy
 - Migration
 - Current Politics
- The EU's Perspective: What Changed?
- Conclusion
- Discussion questions



<https://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/en/press-room/20180424IPR02423/brexit-eu-and-uk-citizens-rights-remain-ep-s-key-priority>



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What do you think?

Was Brexit a total **failure** for the EU?

OR

Can Brexit be **a chance** for the EU?



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Introduction

- UK formally left the EU on **31 January 2020**
- First and only EU member state to withdraw (Article 50)
- Major case of European **disintegration** in political science
- **2020–2025:** shift from EU member to “third country”
- Five-year question: Did Brexit deliver on sovereignty, economy, migration, democracy?
- **Consequences affect both the UK and the EU** (sovereignty, enlargement, differentiation)



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<https://edition.cnn.com/videos/world/2020/02/01/brexit-day-stewart-pkg-vpx.cnn>

2020 – 2025 = “An Era of Permanent Instability”

Leadership Turnover (2020–2024)

- Boris Johnson — “Get Brexit done” → Resigned 2022
- Liz Truss — 49-day premiership → Market turmoil
- Rishi Sunak — Technocratic stabilization attempt



<https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2023/jun/10/boris-johnson-resignation-statement-really-meant>

Political Realignment (2024–2025)

- 2024: Labour landslide — ends 14 years of Conservative rule
- 2025: Reform UK surge — polling ~33% (Ipsos, Nov 2025)
- Drivers: Public frustration with incomplete Brexit delivery



<https://bylinetimes.com/2024/05/31/nigel-farage-bbc-question-time-questions-not-asked-media/>



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 The Guardian

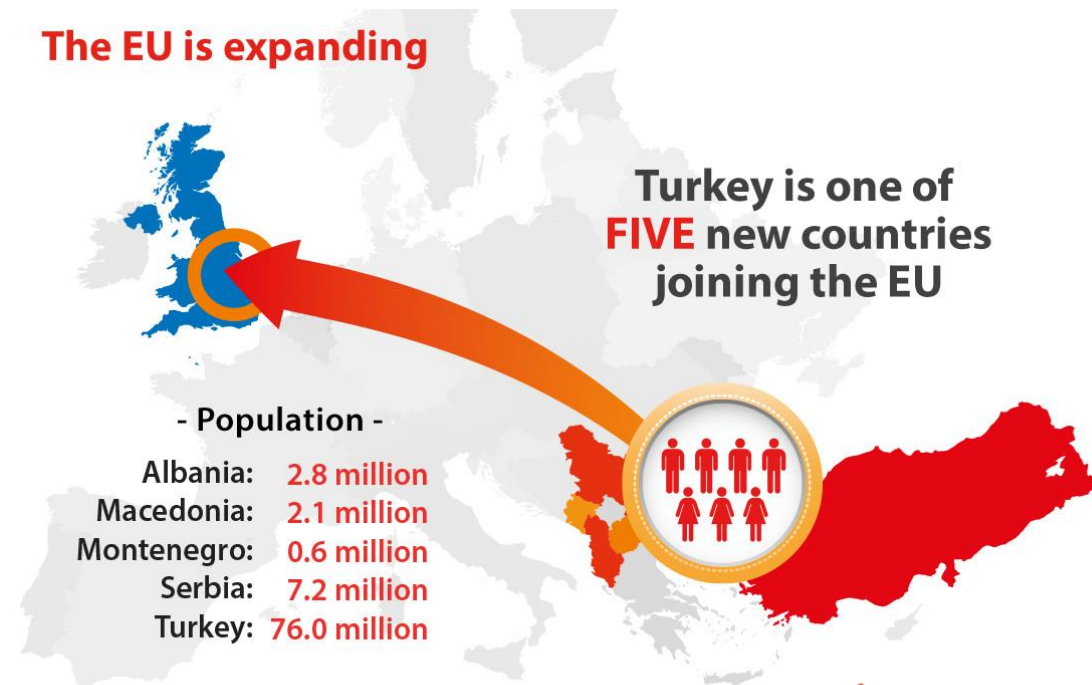
‘It feels like we never left’: resentment builds in one of UK’s firmest Brexit-backing areas

Keir Starmer says Britons have moved on but many in Thurrock think they were lied to in debate about leaving EU.

17 May 2025

Vote Leave: If we vote to stay in the EU:

The EU is expanding

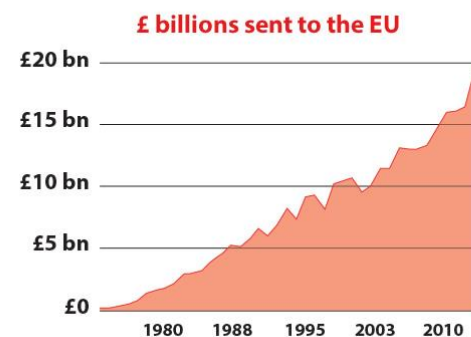


Immigration will continue to be out of control

Nearly 2 million people came to the UK from the EU over the last ten years. Imagine what it will be like in future decades when new, poorer countries join.



The EU will cost us more and more



The EU already costs us £350 million a week

– enough to build a new NHS hospital every week. We get less than half of this back, and have no say over how it's spent.



We'll have to keep bailing out the €

The countries that use the Euro already have a built-in majority, meaning they can always outvote us. You will be paying the bill for the Euro's failure.

The European Court will still be in charge of our laws

It already overrules us on everything from how much tax we pay, to who we can let in and out of the country, and on what terms.



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“Take Back Control”: Promises vs. Outcomes

“£350 million a week for the NHS”	= redirect EU contributions to the NHS	No identifiable “Brexit dividend”. UK tax burden remains historically high.
“Turkey is joining the EU”	= implied future enlargement threat used by Leave campaign	Turkey is not and was not close to accession. Claim used to spark migration/security fears
→ “Control the borders”	= restore full control over migration	UK net migration reached record highs, mainly from non-EU countries
“End the EU superstate”	= escape expanding EU integration	EU integration accelerated (fiscal and defence), while UK–EU trade friction increased



From “Bonfire” to “Assimilation”

Retained EU Law

The Original Plan (2022)

- Retained EU Law Bill aimed **to revoke 4,000+ EU-derived laws** by end of 2023
- Sunset clause: any law not actively preserved would automatically expire

What Actually Happened (2023–2024)

- May 2023: Government abandoned the sunset clause due to economic and legal risks
- Outcome: ~**600** mainly obsolete laws revoked
- Jan 2024: “**Assimilated Law**”



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From “Bonfire” to “Assimilation”

Where Things Stand Now?

- Ministers can amend or replace retained law until **June 2026** (“smarter regulation”)
- Around 3,000 EU-derived laws effectively remain in force

Example: **CE marking** recognised indefinitely; UKCA label largely abandoned

Implication:

Legal sovereignty achieved — but regulatory interdependence persists.



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State of Democracy: Has It Improved?

External Democratic Standards

The Freedom House Trajectory (2020–2025):

2020	Withdrawal Year	94/100
2021–2023	The Volatile Years	93/100
2024	Election Year	91/100
2025	Current	92/100 ("Free")

- The UK remains a top-tier democracy externally, though scores dipped slightly during **the chaotic post-Brexit transition**.
- The 2024 election provided a slight recovery in stability.



State of Democracy: Has It Improved?

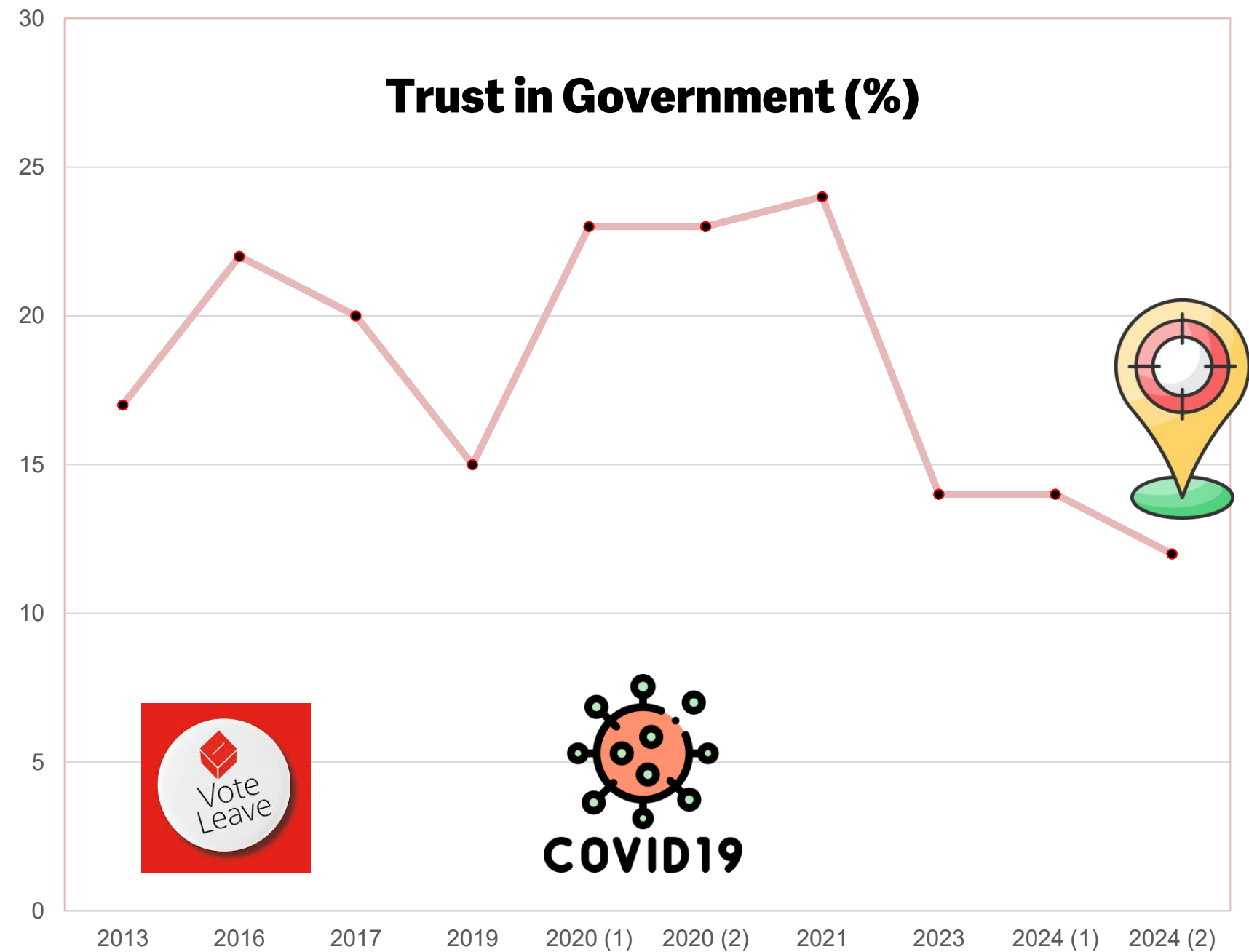
The Internal View:

The Crisis of Confidence

- Trust in Government: Collapsed to a **record low of 12%**.
- The "Responsiveness" Deficit: 68% of the public believe "politicians do not listen to people like me".
- The UK has achieved **legal sovereignty**, but its citizens feel less empowered than before.



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Economy & Migration

- Economic and migration related arguments were central to the leave campaign
- The UK economy was presented as held back by EU regulations, while migration symbolized a loss of control



https://i.guim.co.uk/img/media/b5ef9a4733a1111bad0bdbacb1573a071730445f/0_386_3789_2274/master/3789.jpg?width=1300&dpr=2&s=none&crop=none (last accessed 25 November 2025)



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Economic promises

- More money for the national budget (£350 million for the NHS)
- Better trade deals
- Cutting all retained EU law by 2023
- Higher growths, more jobs, stronger competitiveness



https://i.guim.co.uk/img/media/b5ef9a4733a1111bad0bdbacb1573a071730445f/0_386_3789_2274/master/3789.jpg?width=1300&dpr=2&s=none&crop=none (last accessed 25 November 2025)



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Economic reality

- The “£350 million per week” for the NHS never materialized and were misleading from the start
- Most trade deals simply copied EU-Agreements
- The plan to cut all retained EU law by 2023 was abandoned because it was unrealistic and economically dangerous
- Some estimates suggest the UK economy is several percentage points smaller than it would have been without Brexit (Norbäck 2025)



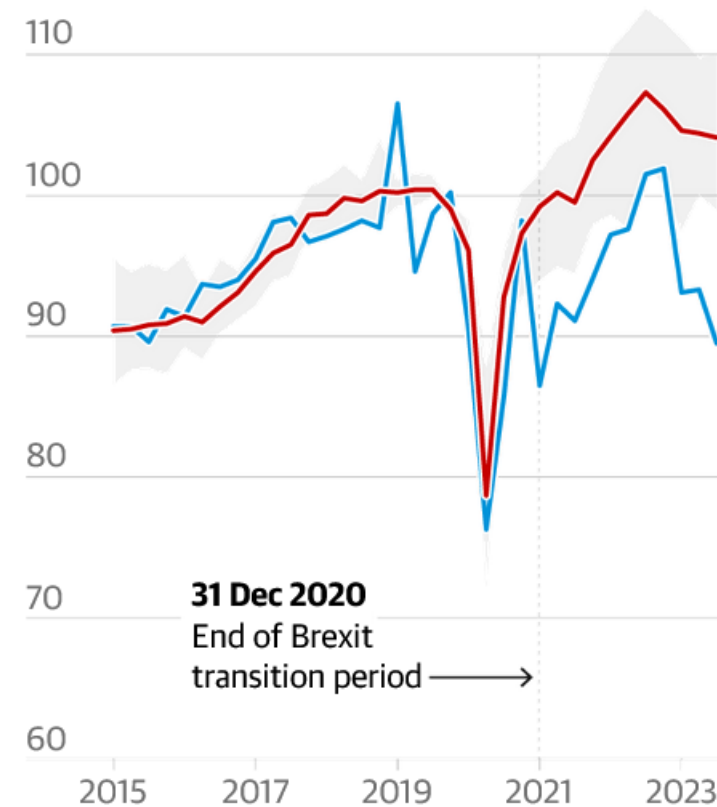
Economic reality

Aylott, 2025

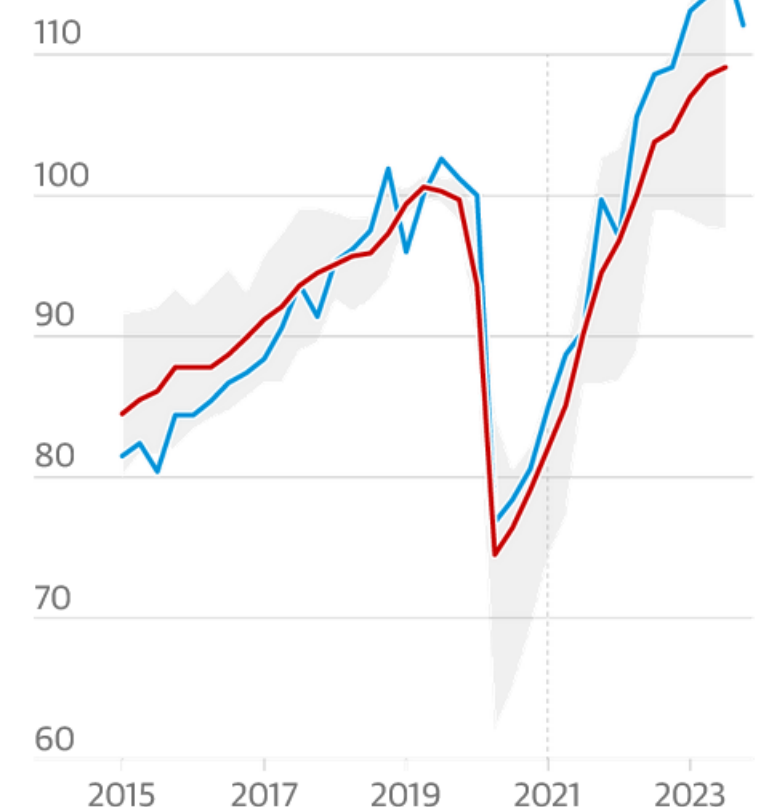
- Trade and services dropped significantly after Brexit
- Some estimates suggest the UK economy is several percentage points smaller than it would have been without Brexit (Norbäck 2025)

■ UK ■ Average of G7 excluding UK

Goods trade-to-GDP ratio, 2019 = 100



Services trade-to-GDP ratio, 2019 = 100



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Migration Promises

- Reduce overall migration levels
- Re-establish full UK border control
- Improve national security by reducing migration from the EU
- Replace free movement with a controlled, skill-based system

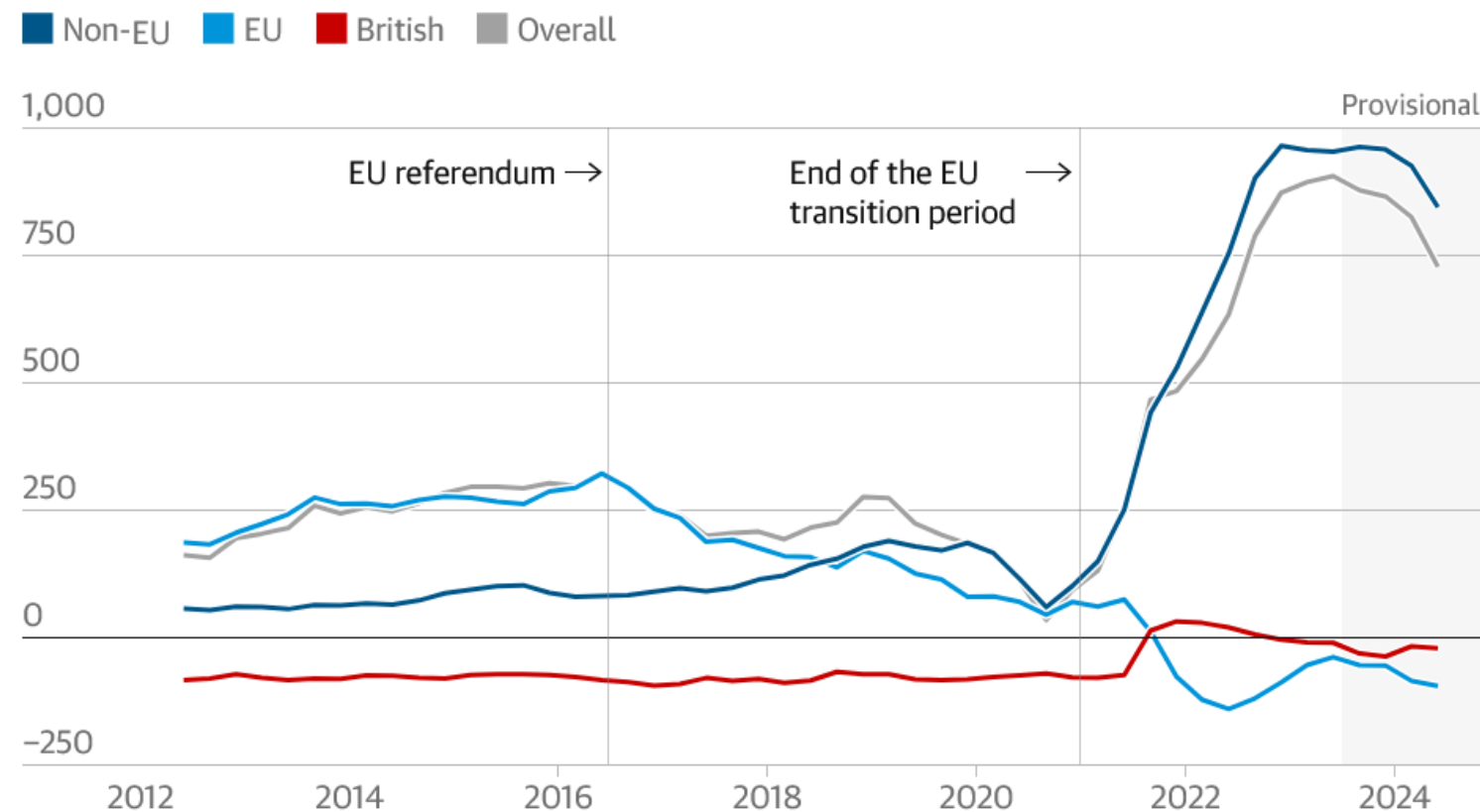


Migration Reality

- Overall migration increased rather than decreased
- EU migration dropped but non-EU rose sharply
- UK labour shortages increased dependence on migration
- No evidence the EU migration increased crime or threatened security
- Post-Brexit system became more complex than simpler



Migration Reality



Guardian graphic. Source: ONS

Aylott, 2025

- Overall migration increased rather than decreased
- EU migration dropped but non-EU rose sharply



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Summary

- Brexit has not delivered the core compromises of the Brexit campaign in the fields of economy and migration
- Economic performance has lagged behind comparable EU economies
- Migration outcomes contradict expectations
- Structural dependencies remain unchanged

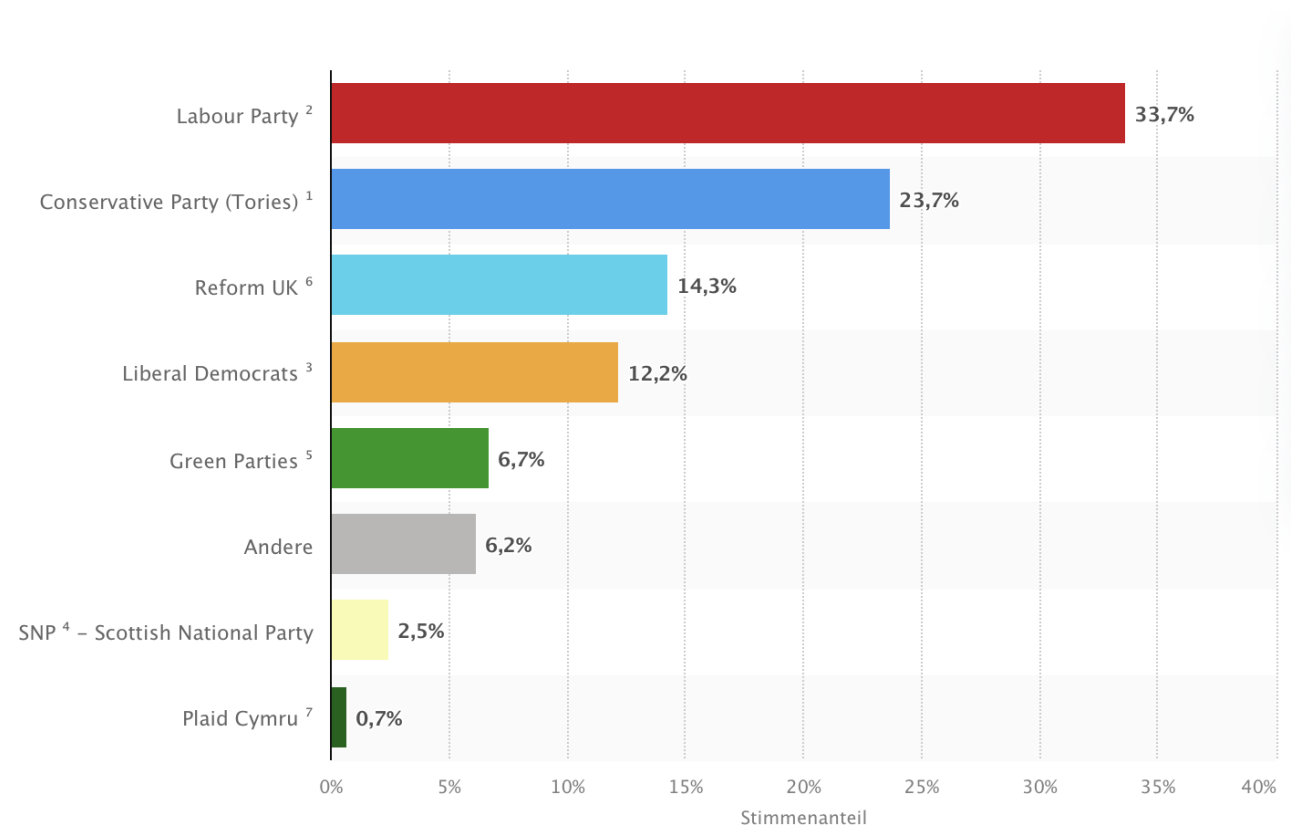


The UK's Perspective: What Changed?

Current Politics

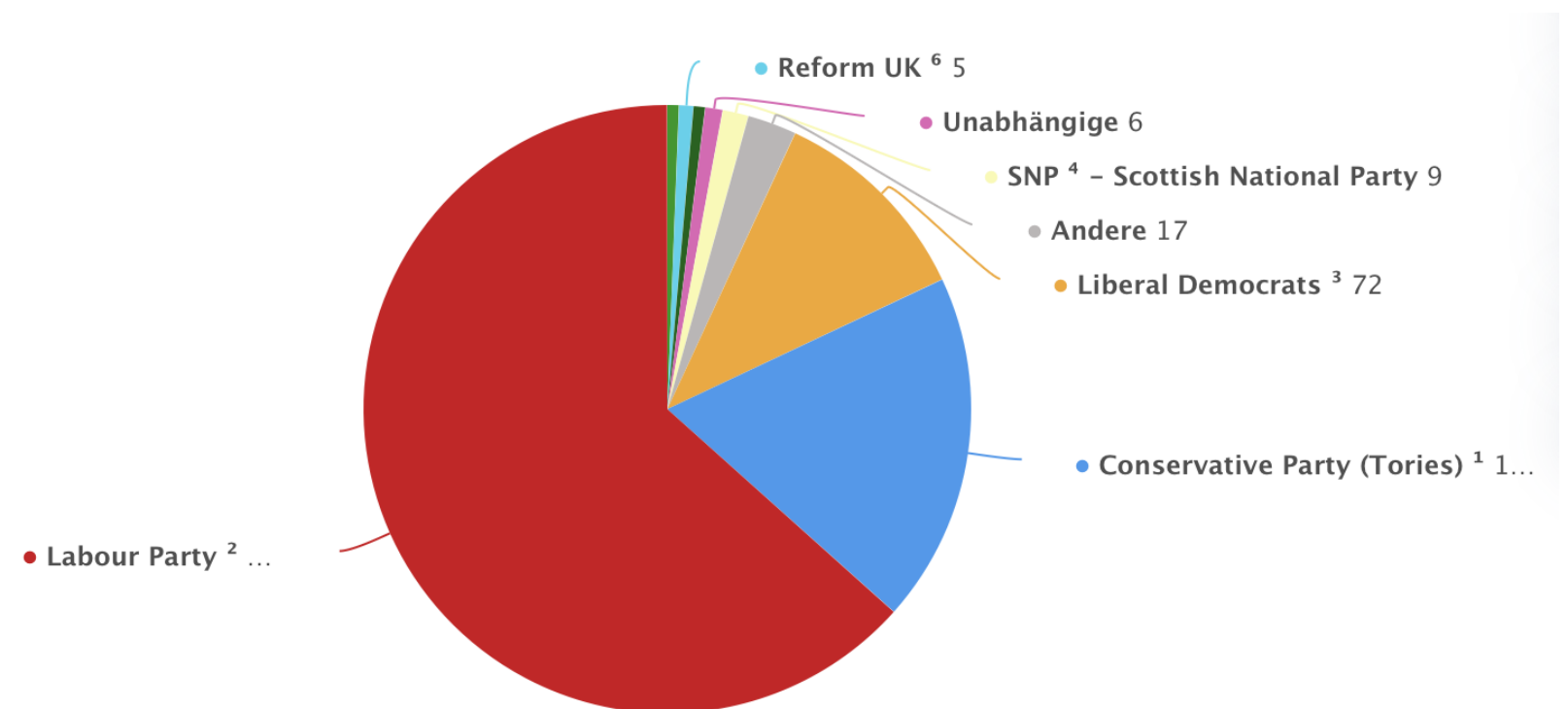
- Remember: Results of parliamentary elections 04/07/2024

share of votes



<https://de.statista.com/statistik/daten/studie/1477648/umfrage/ergebnis-der-parlamentswahl-in-grossbritannien-2024/>

seats



<https://de.statista.com/statistik/daten/studie/1477653/umfrage/ergebnis-der-parlamentswahl-in-grossbritannien-nach-mandaten-2024/>

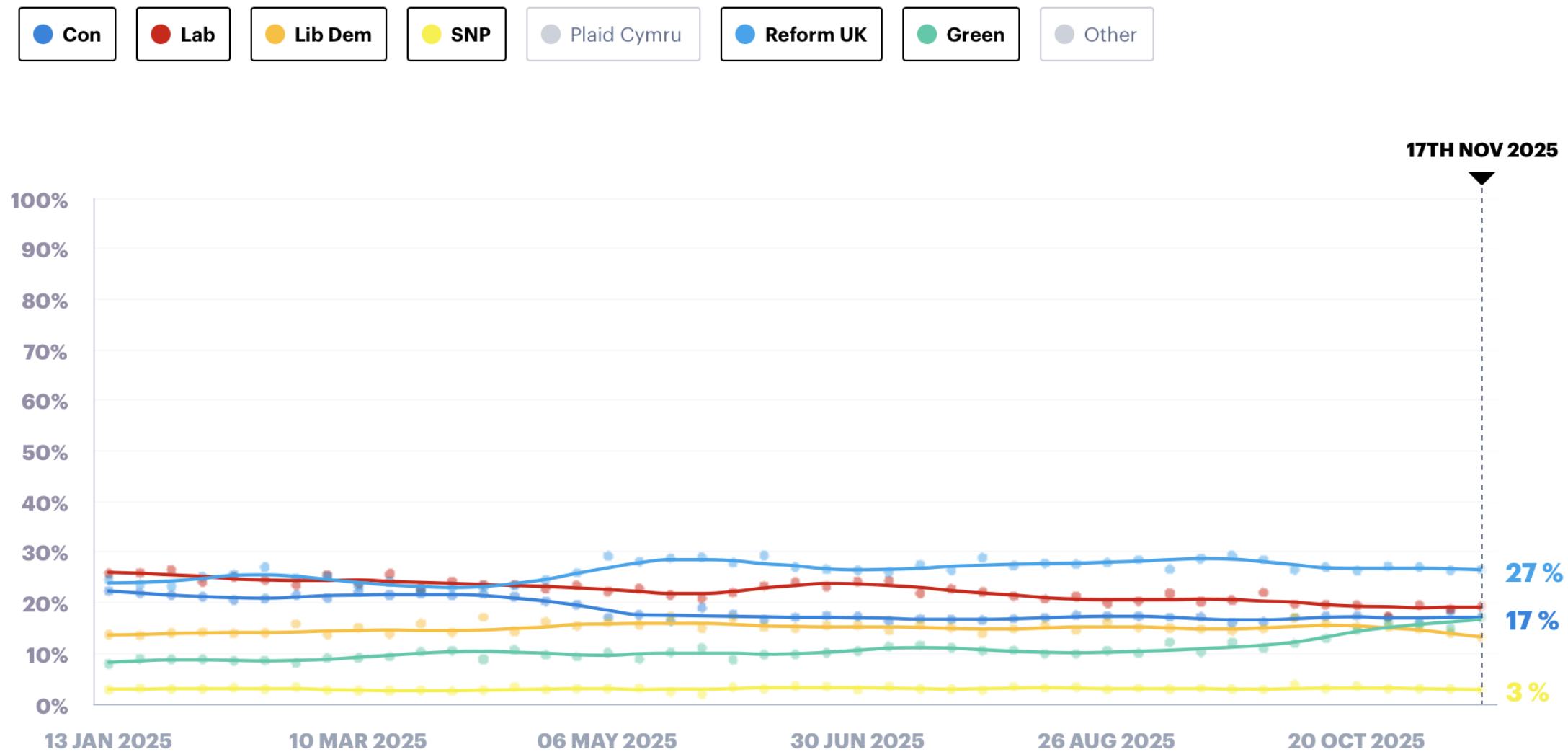


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The UK's Perspective: What Changed?

Current Politics

Voting intention



<https://yougov.co.uk/topics/politics/trackers/voting-intention>

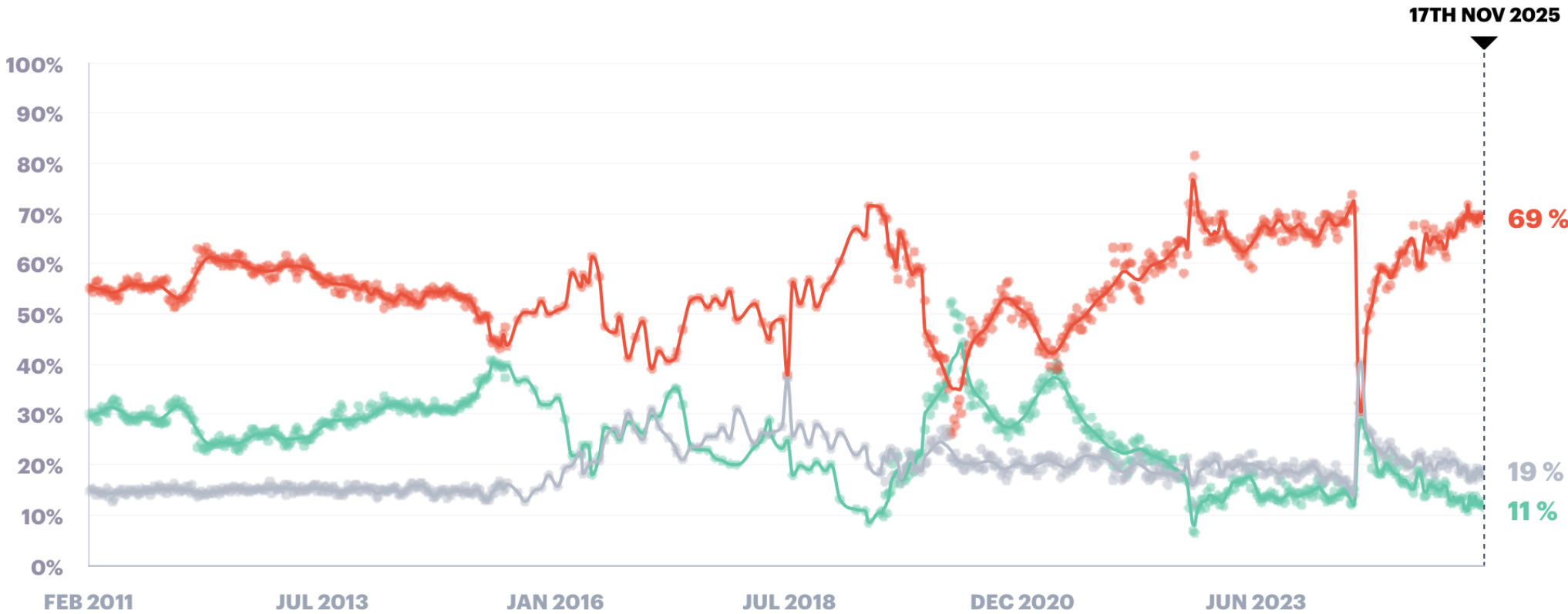


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The UK's Perspective: What Changed?

Current Politics

Government approval



<https://yougov.co.uk/topics/politics/trackers/government-approval>



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Search				Fame ▾	Popularity ▾
1		Nigel Farage	Reform UK	98%	38%
2		Andy Burnham	Labour	76%	34%
3		Jeremy Corbyn	Independent, previous Labour	96%	30%
4		David Frost	Non-affiliated, previous Conservative	72%	30%
5		David Blunkett	Labour	70%	27%
6		Keir Starmer	Labour	97%	27%
7		John Major	Conservative	89%	25%

<https://yougov.co.uk/ratings/politics/popularity/politicians-political-figures/all>

The UK's Perspective: What Changed?

Current Politics

Nine years on from the EU referendum, most Britons believe that it was wrong to vote to leave the EU

In hindsight, do you think Britain was right or wrong to vote to leave the European Union? %



YouGov

Latest data: 16-17 June 2025 • [Get the data](#)

Only 31% continue to say this was the right decision, although two thirds of Leave voters (68%) still believe they made the right choice.



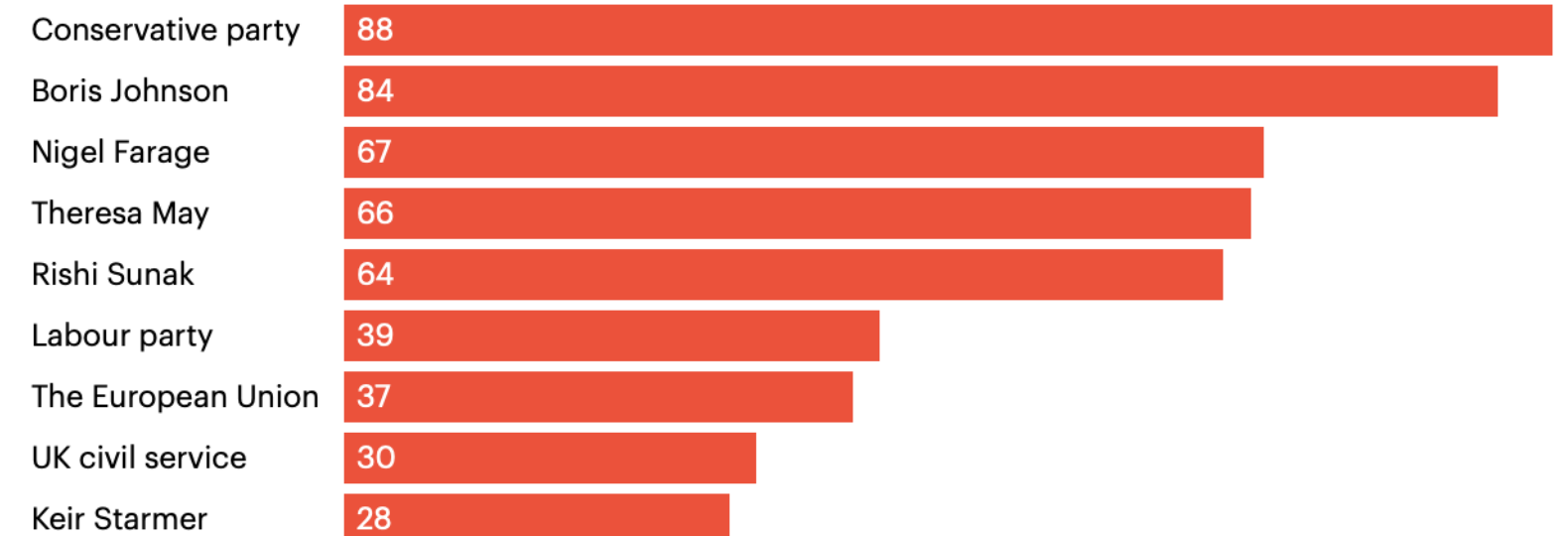
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61% of Britons say they think Brexit has been more of a failure than a success: who do they blame for that?

In your previous answer you said that Brexit has been more of a failure. How responsible, if at all, do you think the following have been for this?

% saying each of the following are very or somewhat responsible

Sample: 1,414 Britons who say Brexit has been more of a failure than a success



YouGov

16-17 June 2025

➡ 65 % favour a closer relationship with the EU, across all party lines (51-78 %) and even Leave voters (60 %)

➡ 56 % want to rejoin the EU, only 24 % of Leave voters, But only 37 % see a return as the right priority compared to other issues

The EU's perspective: What Changed? Influence of Brexit on EU integration

Brexit = disintegration

- For the first time, the EU lost a member state -> clear example of disintegration
- The EU has shown unity regarding this crisis: BUT it is challenged by major disagreements (e. g. about the rule of law), populist parties, and the perceived lack of democracy
- Brexit could be used to negotiate opt-outs or special regulations
- Fear of a domino effect -> did not happen
- The international standing of the EU may be weakened, and international players may view the EU as weak and divided



The EU's perspective: What Changed? Influence of Brexit on EU integration

Brexit = chance for integration

- One should not overstate Brexit: drama was limited and mostly in Britain internally
- Britain was the “awkward” partner with a preference for autonomy, therefore caution regarding plans for more integration
- Brexit likely strengthened the EU's integrative momentum that emerged during recent crises (especially COVID)
- The EU's post-pandemic recovery fund, “NextGenerationEU” (a form of common debt), probably would not have been created with the UK



The EU's perspective: What Changed? Influence of Brexit on EU integration

Brexit = chance for integration

- The UK would have faced a difficult position in the dispute between EU institutions and Hungary/Poland over linking funds to democratic standards
 - ➡ Balancing liberal-democratic principles with national sovereignty would have been politically sensitive for the UK
- The UK might have pushed for alternative mechanisms of supporting Ukraine, potentially limiting the EU's gains in security capacity
- Brexit is perceived as a turbulent and overall not worth imitating process
- Brexit was neither an economic nor a political success



The EU's perspective: What Changed? Influence of Brexit on EU integration

- Brexit has served as an enabler for more EU integration in the short term.
- The long-term effects remain to be seen.
- The increased integration could lead to a voter backlash.
- Moreover, it has to be seen how the EU handles the ongoing political challenges.



Conclusion

For the UK

- The UK gained formal control over its laws but lost influence in Europe.
- The economy has grown more slowly, and the promised financial benefits never appeared.
- Migration stayed high, just with a different mix of countries (shifting from EU to non-EU sources).
- Politics became less stable , and a growing number of people now think Brexit was a mistake.



Conclusion

For the EU

- The EU managed to stay united in the face of Brexit, and the "domino effect" did not occur.
- The bloc became more confident, and the UK's departure largely discouraged other member states from leaving.
- Yet challenges remain, including migration policy, rule-of-law disputes, and debates on how far integration should go.
- Overall, the EU managed the process well, while the UK absorbed most of the negative consequences.
- Moving forward, the EU should learn from Brexit and use it as an input for future reforms to fix the internal weaknesses that could cause future instability.



Again: What do you think?

Was Brexit a **total failure** for the EU?

OR

Can Brexit be **a chance** for the EU?



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Discussion questions

- Has Brexit ultimately benefited the EU by uniting it, or has it merely delayed deeper problems?
- Should the EU pursue deeper political integration in the future, or did Brexit show the limits of how far integration can go?
- If the UK held a referendum today on rejoining, should the EU welcome the UK back, or keep its distance?





**Thank you
for the
attention!**

https://ichef.bbci.co.uk/ace/ws/660/cpsprodpb/0D78/production/_100184430_brexit.jpg.webp

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