



## Understanding Reform UK, and their approach to climate change<sup>1</sup>

*The Movement Building Hub, NEON*  
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This paper provides a snapshot analysis of Reform UK (referred to as Reform), a far-right political party that has significantly increased its support in the last 18 months.<sup>2</sup> The paper looks at who is voting for Reform and why, and what tactics Reform are using, especially as it relates to the issue of climate change. The final section of the paper includes interviews with climate organisers and their reflections on how well prepared the climate movement is to deal with the challenge Reform poses and win its agenda in the current moment. While NEON is politically independent - and our focus is on strengthening social movements - the opportunities and threats that movements face are heavily shaped by party politics, and Reform's agenda poses a significant threat to the climate and migrant justice movements especially, which are two focus areas for NEON. This paper was drafted to help social movement organisations better understand the shifting political landscape that Reform's rise represents and which is part of a global trend of rising far-right parties, especially across Europe.

### Contents

- Executive summary.....2
- Where is Reform picking up support?.....2
- Who supports Reform?.....4
- What do Reform supporters care about?.....5
- Contradictions in Reform's base?.....6
- Underlying trends.....7
- How are mainstream parties responding?.....8
- What tactics are Reform using?.....9
- Reform and climate change.....10
- Interviews with climate organisers.....13

<sup>1</sup> This briefing was resourced by non-charitable and non-restricted funding.

<sup>2</sup> We have followed Hope Not Hate and other organisations in labelling Reform as far-right:

<https://hopenothate.org.uk/2024/09/24/reform-uk-are-far-right-heres-why/>

If you'd like to chat with the freelancer who conducted the research and initial drafting, just email Fergal O'Dwyer [fergalmatthew@gmail.com](mailto:fergalmatthew@gmail.com)

## Executive summary

- **Surging popularity:** Reform is growing in popularity, securing 14% in the 2024 GE, 31% in the May local elections, and now controls 10 councils and 2 mayoralities. Polls suggest Reform could win over 100 seats were a general election held now.
- **Broad support base:** While Reform does better among older, white, male voters, and less well in Scotland and London than other areas, it is picking up significant support among a relatively broad cross-section of society, indicating a potential high ceiling.
- **Key issues:** Immigration is the top issue for Reform supporters, followed by the cost of living. These concerns underpin the party's narrative of national decline and systemic failure.
- **Mixed supporter views:** Many Reform supporters favour progressive economic policies (e.g. national living wage, wealth taxes, public transport investment), and a significant portion show openness to climate action when framed in certain ways, even though Reform voters are more likely to oppose net zero targets than other voters.
- **Climate change strategy:** Reform positions net zero as economically harmful and uses job losses in industrial areas to argue that climate policies hurt working people.
- **Tactical flexibility:** Reform often blends left-wing economic arguments or policies with hard-right social positions ('diagonal politics'), to create broad voter appeal. They use polarising issues like ULEZ to divide opposition bases and galvanise their own support.
- **Labour Party response:** Labour has responded to Reform's rise by continuing to harden its stance on immigration, a strategy that appears to alienate most Labour voters while also boosting Reform's appeal among a minority of Labour voters.
- **Impact on climate movement:** Some climate activists warn that Reform's climate framing is cutting through with voters and that the movement's elite focus and lack of working-class representation limit its ability to build broad multiracial working-class coalitions.
- **Need for movement recalibration:** They also argue that the climate movement must pivot toward more grassroots organising, adopt populist economic frames, and actively engage in electoral politics to counter the far-right's influence.

## Where is Reform picking up support?

The 2024 General Election saw a surge in support for Reform, winning five seats and 14% of the vote - the biggest vote share for a far-right party at a general election. In the recent local elections, Reform won 31% of the vote and 677 council seats, and now controls 10 councils and 2 mayoralities, representing its first foray into (local) state governance. [One projection made in Feb 2025](#) calculated Reform would win 102 seats across England and Wales if a general election was held then, [another](#) in April that Reform would win 180, and Reform have recently topped multiple voting intention polls, at 28/29%, indicating the possibility of still higher seat gains. [YouGov polling](#) on voting intention from March 2025 shows Reform achieving a substantial and relatively even share of the vote across the different countries and regions of the UK, with the exception of London and Scotland, where they polled lower. That poll showed Reform at 24% in England, 23% in Wales and 15% in Scotland, with a English

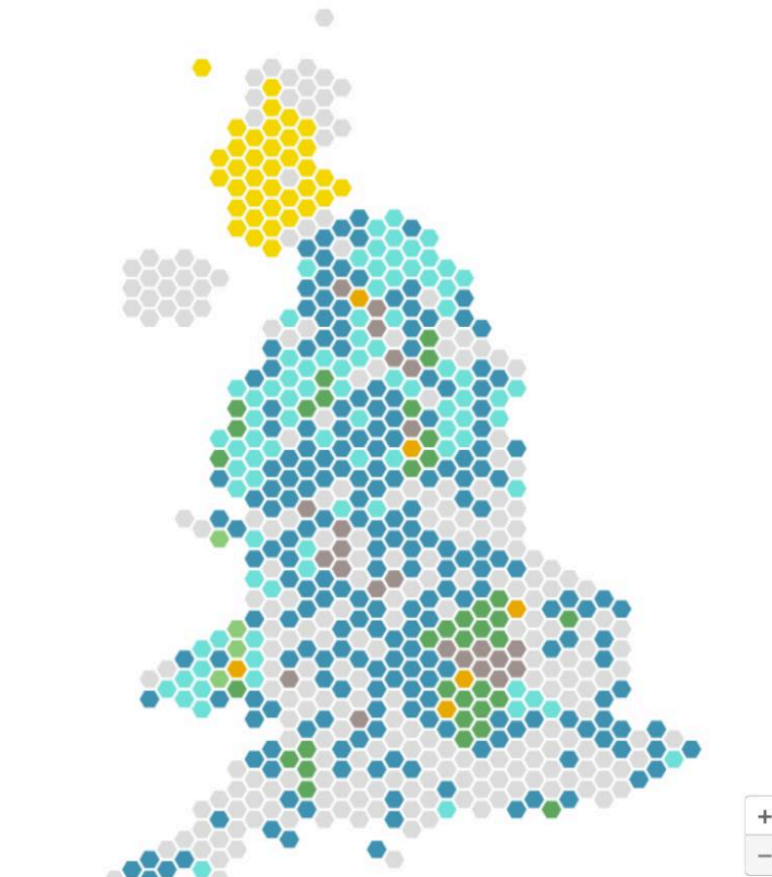
regional breakdown of 26% in the North, 27% in the Midlands, 13% in London, and 25% in the Rest of South. This geographic distribution remains relatively consistent among multiple polls and as Reform's support has grown.

In the 2024 General Election Reform was the second-placed party in a large number of Northern and Welsh constituencies won by Labour (see image below), and polling [by Survation in April](#) had Reform as the joint-second largest Party in Wales along with Plaid Cymru, while more recent [polling](#) had Reform second to Plaid, but 7 points ahead of Labour.

### New rivals

Second-placed party in constituencies won by Labour ([click to view as geographical map](#))

■ Conservative 
 ■ Green 
 ■ Liberal Democrats 
 ■ Others 
 ■ Plaid Cymru  
■ Reform 
 ■ SNP



Map: The Times and The Sunday Times • Source: Election Maps UK • Map data: © Automatic Knowledge Ltd

Reform appears to be targeting seats in Wales, the North of England and the Midlands either currently or previously held by Labour - though it is important to note they are generally taking more votes from the Conservatives. Nonetheless, according to [analysis](#) by LabourList, Reform gained more than four times the number of council seats from Labour than other parties combined at the 2025 local elections. [This year Reform picked up](#)

[its first Welsh councillor](#) in a local by-election in Pontypool, once a Labour stronghold, and Nigel Farage intends to make the 2026 devolved Welsh elections [“by far \[Reforms\] biggest priority.”](#) Notably, Reform’s leadership has been visibly active on the issue of the high-profile closure of the blast furnace at the Port Talbot Steelworks, and the loss of well-paid, unionised jobs that followed (Reform came second in the parliamentary constituency in which the steelworks sits) - indicating a deliberate focus on certain working-class communities and an example of the ‘diagonal politics’ discussed in a later section of this paper. Farage has also called for the [nationalisation](#) of the Scunthorpe steelworks amid the threat of significant job losses there, even taking photos holding materials from trade unions.

## Who supports Reform?

A YouGov voting intention [poll conducted in Jan 2025](#) - which had Reform at 24% - indicates that the party is currently more attractive to men, with 29% saying they would vote for Reform compared to 19% of women. Interest in Reform also increases with age, with 36% of over 65s and 28% of 50-64 year olds saying they would vote for the party in future, compared to 17% of 25-49 year olds and 14% of 18-24 year olds. Other polls tell a similar story, though Reform’s support appears to be slowly becoming somewhat more balanced across age as it grows.

The class composition of Reform’s support is complicated. Polling immediately after the General Election found that [members of Reform are predominantly middle class](#), and it has been [argued](#) that far-right movements or parties typically start as middle class phenomena but over time build broad cross-class coalitions. The social grade system is an incomplete way of understanding class in contemporary society but it does give us some indication. A YouGov [poll](#) conducted in May found that Reform has 37% of the vote share among C2DE voters, whereas Labour and the Conservatives polled just 18 % each. For ABC1 voters, Reform was recorded as having 22% of the vote share, compared to Labour on 26% and the Conservatives on 17%. [According to John Curtice](#), in the recent local elections Reform won 39% of the vote in heavily working-class wards but only 19% in the most middle-class ones. When looking at a sample of those who said they are fairly or very likely to *consider* voting Reform, an Ipsos Mori [poll](#) demonstrated a fairly even spread across lower and higher income brackets with 37% earning up to £19,999, 38% earning £20,000-£34,999, 36% earning £35,000-£54,999 and 36% earning £55,000+. However, as Paula Sturridge [highlighted](#) using data from the British Election Study, more than 1 in 3 working class people (also measured using the social grade system) strongly disliked Reform, and the majority of working class people likely did not vote for any party.

Seats that Reform are likely to win in the next General Election often reflect the profile of current Labour constituencies but [with lower levels of formal education and lower levels of professional workers](#). While often described as working-class constituencies by the media, it is worth noting they often have higher rates of home ownership than average Labour constituencies and are typically slightly older and whiter. In [wards](#) where more than 65% voted Leave, Reform won on average as much as 45% of the vote. In contrast, in places where a majority backed Remain, only 19% voted for Reform. While Reform has significant support among working-class people, like UKIP before, it is important to stress that it [also has a significant following among the professional middle-classes](#), as well as wealthy retirees. While Reform is significantly more popular among men than women, and less popular in London and Scotland, Reform appears increasingly to be picking up votes across a broad

cross-section of society and the country (as the image below indicates), which could indicate a relatively high potential ceiling for the Party.

A representative sample of 2,248 British adults were interviewed online between February 7th and 11th 2025					
Of those very or fairly likely to <i>consider</i> voting Reform at next GE.....					
UP TO £19,999		£20,000 - £34,999	£35,000 - £54,999	£55,000+	
37%		38%	36%	36%	
North	Midlands	South	London	Wales	Scotland
36%	39%	35%	32%	39%	32%
Male	Female				
44%	28%				
White Ethnic Group	Minority Ethnic Group				
37%	29%				
18-34	35-54	55+			
36%	33%	39%			

Source: [Ipsos Mori](#), March 2025. See the data breakdowns, which were inserted into this table.

Ipsos Mori polling in March indicates that overall as many as 36% of people are fairly or very likely to consider voting for Reform at the next election. Though the next general election may not be for four years, if this figure is translated into vote share at the next general election it would represent a remarkable rise for a party outside of the more established parties - which are often buffered by First-Past-the-Post - and it would continue a transformation in voting habits, which may have implications for the voting system itself. Notably, while we have used the term far-right to describe Reform, the mainstreaming and normalisation of the party, and the varied nature of its expanding support base, should be factored into communications and organising strategies for social movements and progressive organisations, especially when trying to engage with Reform supporters or those considering voting for the party.

## What do Reform's supporters care about?

Unsurprisingly, almost all polls demonstrate that the number one issue for the significant majority of Reform supporters is migration (limiting or stopping migration). When [asked by Ipsos Mori](#) which issues would help decide their vote, 78% of Reform 2024 voters cited immigration (followed by 59% citing inflation/the cost of living), while 69% of those considering voting Reform in the next election cited immigration. [A report by JLP](#) highlights that constituencies Reform are projected to win are distinctive in their prioritisation of stopping illegal migration and the cost of living in deciding how they will vote. While the main issue that divides projected Reform constituencies from the rest of the country is stopping illegal migration, the issue salience of the cost of living crisis in these constituencies has [increased by 12 points to 45% since the general election last year](#) (similar to Labour voting constituencies). In the last 18 months we've seen a clear pivot from Reform to using the cost of living crisis as a core part of their messaging, reflecting the concerns of voters in target constituencies. This concern with the cost of living is reflective of how other far-right parties are picking up votes in other countries,

as illustrated by [polling following the recent German elections](#) showing that 75% of the AFD party's voters were worried about paying their bills (a higher percentage of their voters of any other party).

## Contradictions in Reform's base

Despite significant alignment on the issue of migration, it would be a mistake to treat Reform's support base as a homogenous group. A poll by Hope not Hate of 4000 Reform voters found divergent attitudes on a range of issues, for example, a significant section hold pro worker rights positions and a desire to see action on climate. NEON recently [compiled](#) available polling data on the attitudes of Reform 2024 voters to a range of issues, which included data showing that:

- 45% [agree](#) with taxing wealth in line with income.
- 52% [support](#) ban on zero-hour contracts & 66% support national living wage.
- Of those living in rural communities, 58% were in [favour](#) of the government building more homes in rural communities, versus 39% against.
- 48% to 38% say that the government should [prioritise](#) improving public transport over improving things for drivers.
- Reform voters are divided on basic facts about climate – [including](#) if it's manmade or not (35% to 41%), and if [we](#) should be worried about it or not (split about 50-50).
- But on some climate policies:
  - 66% [support](#) home energy efficiency.
  - 59% [support](#) a publicly-owned energy company.
  - 48% [prefer](#) investment in public transport over cars.

Exploring how softer or more economically progressive sections of Reform's base could be won over to social movement agendas through the use of 'wedge issues' will be vital to building broad and successful coalitions for transformational change.

Divergent voter attitudes on a range of issues are fairly typical of the base of any contemporary political party, but especially so with Reform, which is a new and insurgent party growing quickly and bringing together a relatively new coalition of voters in an era of significant voter volatility. The number of voters switching parties between elections has accelerated in recent years. It was over two-in-five in 2015 - up from 1 in 5 in the 1970s and 80s - and evidence [suggests](#) the it was even higher in the 2024 General Election (following lower voter volatility in 2019). Reform also has less obvious ideological traditions and has demonstrated political opportunism or tactical flexibility on a wide range of issues, though they do have a relatively clear agenda. In this context of voter volatility, it is important to note that Reform's base is at this stage likely relatively fragile, despite fairly consistent polling over the last few months. A January [survey](#) that showed a "quarter of all Brits considering voting for Reform" also showed that only 28% of those voters would have no reservations about voting for the party. Issues cited include the party's lack of experience, a belief that voting Reform won't make a difference in a First-Past-The-Post system, and concerns that the party is too right-wing or extreme. Additionally a recent [YouGov poll](#) found that the British public are yet to see reform as a "big party" and the concerns amongst their

voting base that First-Past-the-Post would mean voting for reform would be a wasted vote. This latter perception is likely shifting as Reform top the polls and win a significant number of council seats. Indeed, [polling in May](#) revealed that Britons are now slightly more likely to consider Reform UK (37%) as the main opposition party, ahead of the Conservatives (33%).

## Underlying trends

A key part of Reform's appeal is that it is seen as an insurgent party capable of challenging a two-party political system which is widely perceived as being broken, with trust in UK political parties regularly measured at [record lows](#). An Ipsos Mori survey revealed that the first and second reasons that those considering voting Reform [in the next election cited](#) are "that they are most likely to provide the UK with the change that it needs" and that "they are most likely to do what they say they will". Similarly, a [YouGov poll](#) found that Reform's distinct identity compared to the established parties is key to its appeal, with 19% of Reform UK considerers saying that the most attractive aspect of the party is the fact they are neither Labour nor the Conservatives, or that they are better than the rest. As NEON wrote in the days following the 2024 General Election:

"Reform presents itself both as a product ("we exist because people aren't being listened to") and a solution to this political crisis ("we will take on the political system to give people a real voice"), partially shut out by an unfair voting system that serves out-of-touch political parties. Reform's strategy will be to push for an overhaul of the political system, including withdrawal from the European Convention on Human Rights, which the Conservative Party may also support depending on who becomes leader. Animating this agenda will be an anti-migrant and anti-minority discourse that presents foreigners and other 'others' as a threat to the nation and at odds with 'British values', and unjustly consuming scarce resources at the expense of 'ordinary Brits', including housing and welfare - reflecting Reform's tendency to speak to but misdirect legitimate frustrations many people have at the degradation of public services, difficulty accessing secure and affordable accommodation and a lack of stable and well paid work."

The economic disruption and stagnation that has characterised the UK in the last 15 years cannot be underestimated as a key driver of support for Reform. From the 2008/9 financial crisis to the austerity agenda that followed, significant periods of wage stagnation and the proliferation of insecure work, and the more recent inflationary period - for many millions of people life has got harder and worse in recent years, and current projections indicate this trend will continue. [The Centre for Cities also reports](#) that every part of the UK has seen a decline in living standards since 2010, with the average person being £10,200 poorer, while a JRF [model](#) shows that living standards are set to fall across the rest of the decade, with the average family £750 worse off in real terms by April 2029 compared to now.

These trends are intimately linked to collapsing trust in a political system in which politicians have been unable and unwilling to meaningfully respond to this economic situation with either recognition or adequate policy interventions. Yet while both of these trends are key to understanding Reform's growth, the Party's rise cannot be separated from the unresolved legacies of the British Empire and the everyday realities of state and popular racism in the UK. This drives a significant amount of Reform's support and structures how Reform articulates their explanation for people's difficulties, with a focus on immigration and minorities as the primary problem. This

does not mean that all Reform supporters are racist, but it does mean that populist economic strategies - while powerful tools - are by themselves not enough. A principled anti-racism, combined with forms of relational organising and trust building, will be key to challenging racism at the local level and building broad coalitions around shared interests and material issues. NEON has various tools that can support organisations to develop this approach, including the Race Class Narrative and our Transformative Organising programme.

## How are mainstream parties responding?

Following the last general election NEON wrote that it is likely that “Labour will also attempt to ‘combat’ the rise of Reform by taking up right-wing positions on a range of social issues.” Labour’s digital media strategy (which often advertises and celebrates deportation numbers, and targets those adverts in areas where Reform is building support), its general rhetoric on the issue of migration (which has recently echoed Enoch Powell’s ‘Rivers of Blood’ speech), and the recently announced Border Security, Asylum and Immigration Bill, confirm this approach. Within the Parliamentary Party, a ‘Red Wall’ group of MPs has also been [pushing the Leadership](#) for a tougher line on migration, citing the threat of Reform in their constituencies as a reason, while Blue Labour are increasing their profile and have been making economic and cultural arguments against migration. For some, this reflects an ideological position against migration, but generally this is understood as part of a strategy to neutralise Reform and protect against a further loss of votes. This strategy - which ignores the significant threat to Labour from its left flank and the Liberal Democrats, as well as low levels of enthusiasm among core Labour voters - does not seem to be working. Recent [polling](#) has shown that between mid-April and mid-May (and following the local elections and the announcement of the Border Security, Asylum and Immigration Bill) Starmer’s unfavorability rating increased among Reform 2024 voters (2pts) and increased significantly among Labour supporters (17pts). Notably, the same poll showed that among Labour 2024 votes the percentage with a favourable attitude towards Reform increased by 9pts - indicating that Labour’s strategy may simply be reinforcing Reform’s arguments and popularity even among some of Labour’s own supporters, while simultaneously alienating a more sizable chunk.

A recent discourse analysis conducted by NEON found significant similarities in how the issue of migration is framed by Reform, Labour and the Tories. This analysis found that migration is exclusively discussed by all three parties as a ‘crisis’ that needs to be solved through punitive solutions, and not as something natural or beneficial. The analysis highlights that four primary ‘problem’ frames dominate the current political discourse around migration:

- Economic scarcity & pressure on public services
- National security
- Cultural decline
- Excessive generosity

While there is difference in emphasis between the parties, there is consistency of narrative. Together these frames underscore the bigger picture narrative that ‘Britain is broken’ and migration is to blame – which leads all of Reform’s materials. As we have seen in Germany and France, the strategy pursued by the Centre of trying to

appease the Radical Right and win over their voting base by mimicking their rhetoric and adopting some of their policies has only served to reinforce the validity of their arguments and, ultimately, strengthen their position.

## What tactics are Reform using?

How Reform has capitalised on the current political moment has been discussed relatively extensively. Key approaches or tactics they use include:

- Reform has made effective use of social media. They place an emphasis on 'owned' media content (content on media or channels you can control or significantly influence, such as outriders) and engage directly with their supporters. Reform also benefits [from an international ecosystem of far-right digital](#) communications infrastructure across Facebook, Youtube and Twitter, and which is having a powerful cultural and political influence globally.
- In terms of political positioning and messaging, Reform often pitch to the Left on economic issues whilst maintaining traditionally right-wing talking points on social issues like migration. This strategy - sometimes called ["diagonal politics"](#) - is increasingly common across the European far-right. An example of this is the pivot towards highlighting the cost of living crisis, with a focus on utility bills in particular, and industrial job losses (often blamed on the 'net zero agenda'). While this is primarily a rhetorical tactic, it has been backed up by some proposals or demands that are more traditionally associated with the Left, such as the semi-nationalisation of utilities and key industrial sectors such as steel, as well as proposing progressive political reforms such as the abolition of the House of Lords. This should be understood in part as a maneuver to change the Party's image as being one in favour of extreme free-market policies and is reflective of Reform's political flexibility.
- Reform appears to be deliberately picking polarising issues to intervene on that can split the bases of their opponents, especially as it relates to tackling climate change. ULEZ is one example, and Reform intervened effectively around this issue by framing the policy as an assault on working people - including small business owners/sole traders, commuters, and low-income professionals - and pitted environmental goals against economic concerns, as they have also done around industrial job losses, and where the climate movement has generally been less active.
- Early signs also indicate that Reform will attempt to use newly acquired positions of power and influence in local and regional government to follow a Trump-like insurgent strategy of picking highly symbolic fights around the issues of [net zero](#), [support for asylum seekers](#) and 'DEI', as a means to generate controversy and attention and materially undermine staff and third sector organisations working on these issues. In the context of underfunded and hollowed-out local government, it remains to be seen how this insurgent strategy meets people's expectations of the local state, noting that anger and dissatisfaction towards local politics is significant at the moment.
- Reform have identified the growth of their local infrastructure and membership as a key strategic area ahead of the next General Election, with a goal to set up 330 new branches, according to research by Hope Not Hate (which forms the basis of this paragraph). They claim to have close to 200k members. While anti-migration and anti-net zero rhetoric is being pushed on the doorstep in many of their target seats, there is evidence that Reform's approach in some areas is hyper-local,

oppositional and with a focus on ‘bread and butter’ issues, e.g. a campaign to reopen a swimming pool in Swindon, a campaign for better bus services in South Shields. While this has some echoes of the local organising that was a feature of the grassroots campaign to leave the European Union, it represents a new development for Reform. Though the extent of this is not yet clear, and in one sense they are simply mirroring traditional tactics used within the mainstream of British politics to different degrees by parties.

## Reform supporters and climate change

### What do Reform supporters think about climate change?

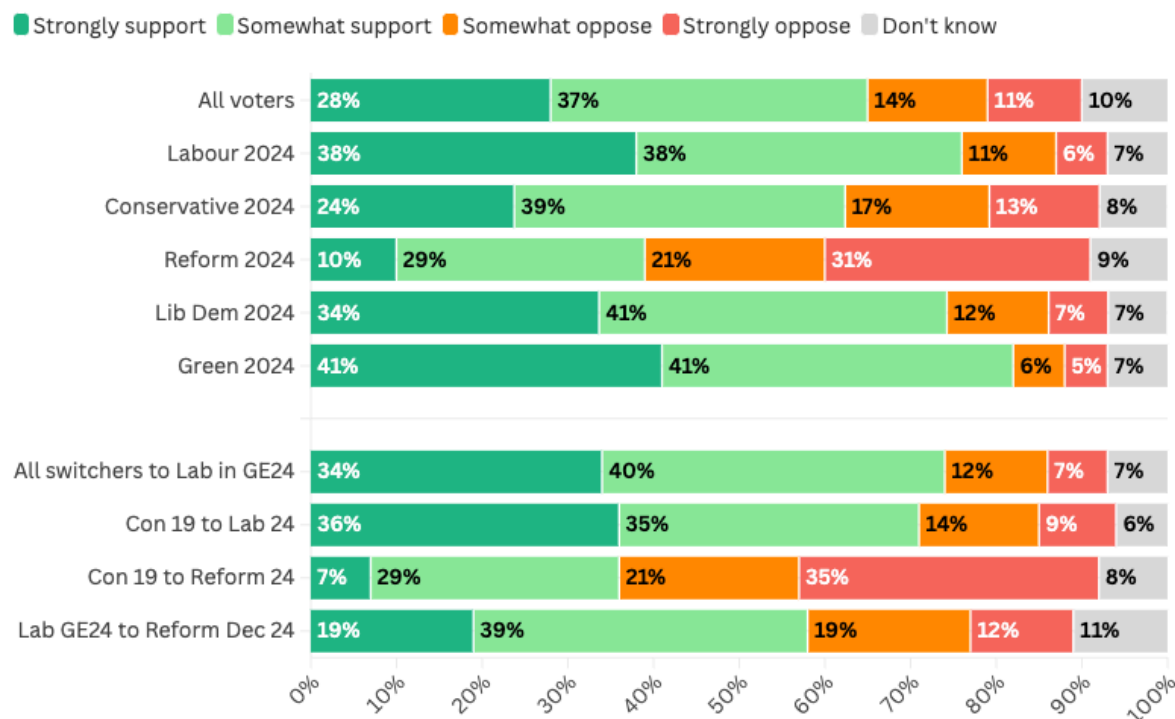
Reform voters are more likely to oppose net zero targets than other voters, with Reform voters and Conservative-to-Reform switchers being the only group of the electorate where more people oppose net zero than support it (see graphic below). Out of voters of all parties, Reform supporters are the least likely to be worried about climate change, and across multiple sources we see this group worried about the cost of climate policies. They have strong [reservations](#) about climate solutions that they see as unaffordable for people like themselves, such as electric vehicles.

However, this hostility is not shared across all sections of Reform’s base. Reform 2024 voters are split on what we should be doing as a country to tackle emissions. By some [surveys](#) more than 60% of them think we’re doing too much to reduce emissions, but [others](#) show, for instance, 27% agreeing we should try as hard as possible to reduce emissions, even if other countries aren’t doing the same.

More than half of Reform 2024 voters also show support for specific emissions-reduction policies when asked. For example, 66% of Reform voters are [supportive](#) of making homes more energy efficient (see above for more examples). Notably, support for individual policies can be swayable depending on who’s calling for it. If a [question](#) tells them that Nigel Farage supports scrapping net zero, versus the same question not mentioning him, their support for scrapping it rises 18%. The way that net zero policies are messaged clearly affects how they land with Reform supporters. Relatedly, when it comes to the transition in industry, focus groups that NEON commissioned revealed that this can be positively framed to people living in industrial communities when a positive story is told about a transition that protects and provides well-paid and secure jobs - now and for future generations - and with a focus on “upgrading” and “future-proofing” rather than “protecting” existing industries.

## Support for Net Zero 2050 target

Reform voters, and Con to Reform switchers, are the only group of the electorate where more people oppose Net Zero than support it



"The Net Zero target is a target set by the government to reach zero greenhouse gas emissions in the UK, balancing any carbon emissions that are produced with carbon reducing measures. Do you support or oppose the government's plan to reach Net Zero by 2050?"

FocalData, December 2024, 4000+ UK adults, nat rep on age gender region education and past vote.

## How have Reform intervened to polarise tackling climate change?

Reform has advocated for policies designed to polarise the debate around net zero, and entrench the idea that net zero stands in opposition to voters' material interests, which runs throughout their rhetoric.

[Reform has proposed scrapping net zero targets](#), arguing that net zero policies are economically detrimental, drive up energy costs, harm businesses and result in job losses. Reform's focus has been on the up front costs of the energy transition and they have announced a slew of policies to slow it down. For example, Reform proposes fast-tracking North Sea oil and gas licenses and developing shale gas.

They also [introduced a policy](#) that farmers who build solar panels on their land will not be able to claim inheritance tax relief and have spoken about how the party would enforce a "windfall tax" on renewable energy. [As a report by 4C Offshore identifies](#), while some of these policies may offer temporary energy security, they "fail to address the long-term need for sustainable energy sources. Renewable energy sources like wind and solar, despite their intermittency, are crucial for reducing dependency on fossil fuels and enhancing energy resilience.

Scrapping net zero could delay the development of a diversified and secure energy system, leaving the UK exposed to future energy crises”.

### **How do Reform talk about climate change?**

Reform’s messaging is aimed at reflecting and driving concerns from voters in target seats about net zero being in opposition to jobs, thriving industry and economic prosperity. Their messaging often links this to a wider story of long-term industrial decline and the broader cost of living crisis. A contribution made by Richard Tice MP in Parliament in October 2024 highlights this, and uses emotive language typically associated with social justice arguments:

*“We saw the devastation in the coal-mining communities in the 1980s; when I have been campaigning, I still hear people talk about that. That was absolutely devastating. The oil and gas industry is under huge threat at the moment because of net zero, which is again devastating. There is a huge loss of the multiplier effect, skills are disappearing and families are concerned.”*

*“It is all very well saying that people can retrain, but if someone earning up there retrain and all of a sudden is earning down there, I do not call that progress—I call that going backwards. The truth is that this issue will have a devastating impact on those communities. I feel that the unions have let down their members and betrayed them.”*

*“That is the reality. Net zero, and the increase in renewable energy capacity, is directly linked to the increase in our electricity prices, and to the fact that we are becoming ever more uncompetitive.”*

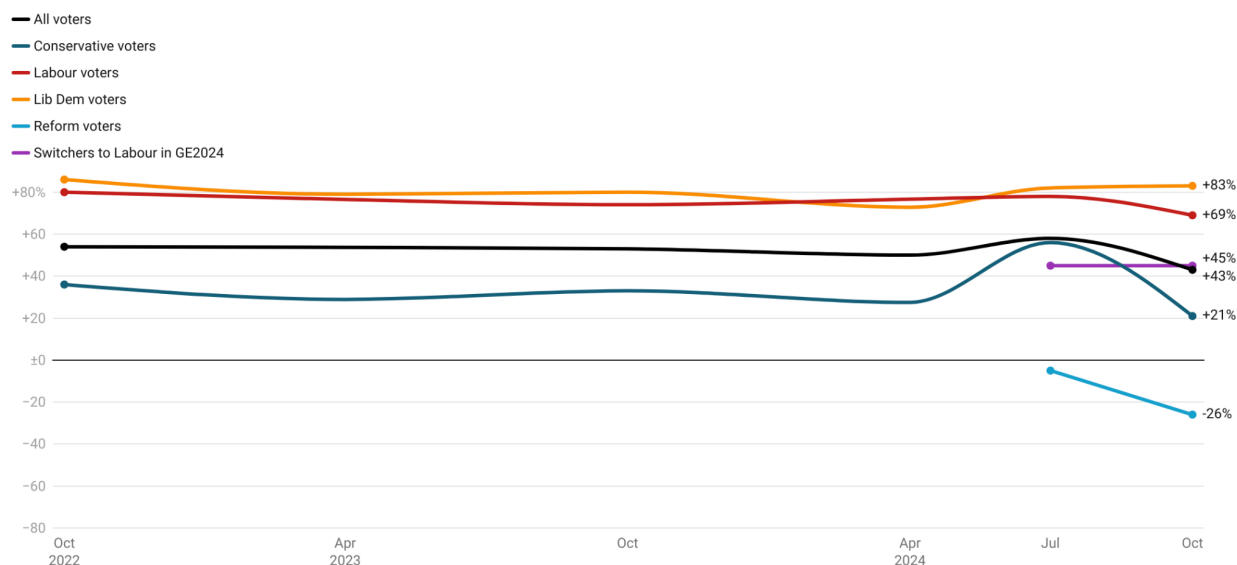
Similarly, in another [speech](#) by Tice: “The British people need to know there is a direct link between the cost of all these subsidies to the vested interests in the renewables industry and your bills, your cost of living.” A recent mapping of the climate movement conducted by Natasha Adams, and which featured interviews with climate movement activists, featured concerns that Reform’s messaging could cut through. 29% of interviewees thought that Reform is essentially correct that the shift to renewables and away from fossil fuels does need investment and will be expensive to implement (although it offers huge savings and benefits in energy security further down the line, on top of climate benefits). Respondents identified that if costs are imposed on communities already struggling with the cost of living crisis this will erode support for climate action and net zero.

### **What effect might this be having?**

Support for net zero has fallen since the last general election amongst Reform and Conservative voters:

## Net support for the UK's Net Zero target remains high across all voter groups, though there is more polarisation on the right than before

Net support = all those who support Net Zero by 2050 minus all those who oppose it



*"The Net Zero target is a target set by the government to reach zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2050 at the latest, balancing any carbon emissions that are produced with carbon-reducing measures, in order to reduce the risks from climate change. Do you support or oppose the UK's target of becoming Net Zero by 2050?". YouGov, 2000+ UK adults per wave.*

Created with Datawrapper

[Connected to this, there is evidence that voters are detached from the idea of achieving net zero.](#) In a Social Market Foundation survey, two-thirds (63%) of respondents believed that 'reaching net zero by 2050 is a nice idea but it will be too difficult to achieve'. Nearly half (48%) felt that the transition is happening to them, not with them, indicating a deeper problem around consent and trust, which the debates around ULEZ partly reflected. Reform's interventions have also had an effect on other political parties. In some instances Labour have tacked to the right on climate issues, [giving the green light to airport](#) expansion and vowing to change planning rules at the expense of nature. The chancellor Rachel Reeves has suggested economic growth [trumps](#) the government's legally binding target of reaching net zero emissions by 2050, repeating Reform's framing that net zero and economic growth and prosperity are in opposition to each other.

## Interviews with climate organisers

How well prepared is the climate movement to deal with the challenge Reform poses to winning its agenda? In order to offer up some reflections on this question, NEON interviewed a number of people in the climate movement. While we strongly believe that powerful movement requires a range of organisations with range different approaches to change or tactics - including advocacy, strategic communications, disruptive action and more - the people we interviewed were primarily involved in some form of organising and campaigning, and are intentionally thinking through the issue of building power, though their observations cover electoral politics, movement building, mass mobilisation and shifting public opinion. While these interviews aren't a representative insight, we wanted to capture some of these perspectives to inform our own capacity-building work in this area and because we believe organising is a key but underresourced tool in pushing back the rise of the far-right and

build durable support for progressive solutions to a range of issues, including climate change. Key points from the interviews included:

***Key actors within the climate movement prioritise an insider approach towards influencing the government, and this needs to be rebalanced with other approaches***

- One interviewee spoke about a “critical undervaluing of the role of public opinion and electoral outcomes in shaping policy” and too much of a focus on elite advocacy based strategies - “trying to change the minds of individual ministers, rather than the political weather around them”.
- “The climate movement too often has the attitude that “we can shortcut movement building, we can shortcut trying to shape or change people's minds and go straight to the people that make the decisions and hold the purse strings”. They felt that this focus on legislative change at the expense of building a popular movement has led to an ability to roll back commitments when there is a public backlash against certain policies led by the right.
- One interviewee observed that funding in the movement is often directed towards policy development and advocacy rather than organising: “the resources of the movement need to be channeled very differently to how they are currently channeled and this feels like a conversation that needs to be happening much more out in the open rather than people moaning about it to each other privately and not really reaching the ears of funders or directors of organisations”.
- They talked about how it would be better if there were more of a pipeline between well-resourced organisations doing policy and advocacy work and campaigns/organising focussed organisations, so that they can mutually reinforce each other.

***The climate movement is too white and too middle class, and this aids Reform***

- Two interviewees talked about how the lack of visible working class representation in the climate movement made it less relatable and easier for the far-right to discredit.
- One interviewee talked about how securing this kind of representation would mean more meaningful work with trade unions. Another talked about the importance of bringing an intersectional frame: observing that issues like air pollution in major cities are more likely to impact working-class people, of whom a disproportionate number are likely to be black and brown.
- Two interviewees thought this explained why parts of the climate movement had adopted a moralistic attitude towards Reform voters and not trying to understand the different reasons people are voting reform: “Yes there is a lot of racism but for some people it is just a protest vote”.
- Another interviewee suggested that the whiteness of leading figures within the climate movement left it unable to build multiracial working-class coalitions. However another interviewee did suggest that waves of BLM protests and strikes have had a positive impact on the climate movement’s ability to incorporate race and class into their analysis, with reparations emerging as a key demand and the formation of internationalist climate movement organizations - for example organising around Palestine - being positive outcomes: “most climate activists today would be able to tell you why the struggle for climate justice necessarily incorporates a fight across the far-right”.

***The climate movement must take an approach that tackles the climate crisis along with raising living standards and reducing inequality, and this might involve embracing populist frames***

- One interviewee spoke about how nimble Reform have been at adopting populist narratives, including around the nationalisation of steel.
- Another interviewee observed that material conditions and inequality being improved would undercut the ability of the far-right to have impact. They caveated this by observing a “tendency from the Left to treat the rise of the far-right as being purely driven by material issues, which risks underplaying the role of structural racism in anti-immigration sentiment that exists outside of worsening material conditions”.
- Another interviewee talked about the importance of bringing people together for small local campaigns that have a climate lens but improve people’s lives in the here and now: for example, lobbying the council over water quality; another interviewee talked about successful local campaigns to oppose incinerators being built in working class areas.

***In order to win, the climate movement needs to be able to demonstrate that it is more popular than Reform, which may involve more mass mobilisation and contesting in the electoral sphere***

- Two interviewees mentioned the importance of challenging the far-right by proving you are more popular than them, which might include “talking about popular policies - including wealth taxes and renationalisation of public services - and showing the far-right for who they really are”. One interviewee talked about how it’s important to embed frames that are explicit about who the enemy is: “it’s not refugees; it’s the billionaire class”.
- One interviewee observed within the movement a transition away from mass mobilisation: “with the decline of Extinction Rebellion and the emergence of Just Stop Oil we have seen a tendency from the activist wing of the climate movement to move away from campaigns of mass mobilization and to small targeted actions designed for maximum attention and in some cases maximum disruption - and I think you need both to be successful”. They acknowledged some successes of a more targeted approach, but suggested that mass mobilisation alongside this radical and more militant flank and an electoral vehicle would be essential in any successful strategy.
- Two interviewees observed that an electoral vehicle through which to advance demands and realise power was an essential part of a successful climate movement ecosystem. They felt that successes for social movements have “only been successful when they have been translated into political power” and that “this might involve engagement with political projects outside of the Labour Party”.
- One interviewee went on to speak about the importance of electoral moments in demonstrating power and changing public opinion, and observed that very few climate movement organisations are resourcing this kind of work: “the role the Uxbridge by-election played in Labour dropping their flagship climate commitment is undeniable, and the narrative that came out of that - this was an election about a rejection of a climate policy - had long term implications.”

Some of these themes - and many others - emerged in a more comprehensive mapping of the climate movement recently conducted by Natasha Adams (and cited above). In those interviews, inside track approaches were most common, but mass mobilisation was mentioned less frequently as a key part of organisations’ theories of change, while community organising was popular across a wide range of organisations but often done more peripherally in

small and sometimes pilot programmes. A key takeaway from this report was that “the climate movement isn’t powerful now - but it has the ingredients to build and wield its power” (“well resourced and well connected across itself, has strong institutions, a wealth of expertise, and is seeing increased investment in organising”). Though several interviews noted that “in order to wield power you need to build power.”

Over the coming months and years NEON will be working with the climate movement, to think through its strategies, skill up leaders and organisations, and build alignment within the movement and with others. If you’d like to chat with us about this, or anything in this paper, just email: [andrew@neweconomyorganisers.org](mailto:andrew@neweconomyorganisers.org)