

UK's Labour faces bruising losses in local polls

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Britain's ruling party is also fearful of a humiliating result in Scotland

AFP | London, United Kingdom

British voters head to the polls tomorrow for local elections set to pile more misery on unpopular Labour Prime Minister Keir Starmer and cement the rise of right- and left-wing populists.

Millions of people are eligible to cast ballots across Scotland, England and Wales, in Starmer's biggest ballot-box test since winning the July 2024 general election by a landslide.

Surveys predict dire results for Labour, which is likely to accelerate talk of a leadership challenge, although no obvious successor exists.

The hard-right Reform UK party of Nigel Farage and the left-wing Greens, headed by self-described eco-populist Zack Polanski, are expected to make gains as voters turn away

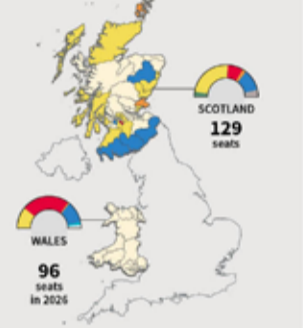
UK LOCAL & REGIONAL ELECTIONS Constituencies at stake on May 7

More than 5,000 representatives will be elected across three levels of local and regional government

Biggest party pre-election: Green Party, Labour, Liberal Democrats, Conservative Party, Reform UK (anti-immigration), Others and coalitions. New constituencies: No vote.



TWO NATIONAL PARLIAMENTS



COUNTY COUNCILS



DISTRICTS, BOROUGH AND UNITARY AUTHORITIES



from establishment parties. "It's partly to do with the government making some unpopular decisions early on in its term and its leader, a hopeless communicator, failing to convey a sufficient sense of change," said political scientist Tim Bale.

"And it's partly to do with an electorate that simply has less patience and less party loyalty than ever," the professor of politics at Queen Mary University of London told AFP.

Surveys suggest Labour will lose control of the devolved Welsh government in Cardiff for the first time since the country got its own parliament 27 years ago.

A YouGov poll published earlier this month showed Reform neck-and-neck with pro-independence Plaid Cymru.

Losing power in Wales would be "disastrous" for Starmer's party, according to Laura McAllister, a politics professor at Cardiff University.

"I think it will take quite some renewal for Labour to get over that," she told AFP.

Britain's ruling party is also fearful of a humiliating result in Scotland, where voters will elect members of the 129-seat devolved Scottish parliament.

When Starmer entered Downing Street on a wave of enthusiasm two years ago, Labour was confident it could regain power north of the border for the first time since 2007.

'Least-worst option'

But surveys now suggest the Scottish National Party (SNP) will extend its 19-year grip on the administration in Edinburgh, with a YouGov poll suggesting Reform could beat Labour to second place.

In England, pollster Robert Hayward has predicted Labour could lose about 1,850 of the roughly 2,550 local authority seats it is defending.

Some 5,000 council seats are up for grabs across the country.

Hayward has tipped Reform to gain some 1,550 seats from Labour and Kemi Badenoch's right-wing Conservatives -- mostly in white, working-class areas.

The Greens are expected to gain hundreds of councillors at

Labour's expense, particularly in London, with a pro-Gaza message.

Starmer has swerved from one misstep to another since ending 14 years of consecutive Tory rule, and is currently engulfed in a scandal over sacked US envoy Peter Mandelson.

He has failed to spur economic growth as British residents continue to feel the effects of a years-long cost-of-living pinch, but has been praised for resisting US President Donald Trump over Iran.

The Greens and Reform "are proposing eye-catching, even if some would say simplistic, solutions to problems that Labour and the Conservatives have struggled to resolve", said Bale.

The media is awash with rumours that former cabinet ministers might try to oust Starmer if the results are bad, but any challenger would need to be nominated by 20 percent of the party's MPs.

"I'm betting he will stumble on as the current least-worst option but it's not a pretty sight," professor Steven Fielding, a Labour expert at Nottingham University, told AFP.

The Times newspaper reported Tuesday that several Labour lawmakers were planning to publish an open letter demanding that Starmer set a date for his resignation if the results were bad.

India approves \$27 bn credit guarantee to help businesses ride out ME war

New Delhi, India

The Indian government approved a \$27.3 billion credit guarantee scheme on Tuesday to help businesses survive short-term cash problems caused by the Middle East war, including airlines hit by surging fuel prices.

The scheme is intended to help businesses get access to loans until March next year so they can ride out the crisis, prevent layoffs and avoid an economic slowdown.

"The proposed credit guarantee scheme is a major step to help businesses... and the airline sector, to ensure their additional working capital needs," a government statement said.

"It will also promote uninterrupted domestic production and maintain the resilience of the ecosystem," it said.

The proposal was approved by a meeting of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's cabinet on Tuesday.

The credit line will operate for five years for most businesses and seven years for airlines, the statement said.

Most of the credit guarantee, \$26.79 billion, is intended for a wide range of businesses. Another \$525 million is also set aside for airlines, many of which have cut domestic and international flights in recent weeks because of rising aviation fuel prices.

Armed man shot by US Secret Service near White House



Washington, United States

An armed man was shot by US Secret Service (USSS) agents in downtown Washington on Monday, officials said, prompting a brief lockdown of the near-by White House.

The shooting near the National Mall occurred shortly after a motorcade carrying Vice President JD Vance had passed by the area, USSS Deputy Director Matthew Quinn said.

Quinn told reporters he did not believe that the vice president was an intended target and said he could not speculate if it was related to recent attempts on the life of President Donald Trump.

"I'm not going to guess on that," he said. "Whether or not it was directed to the president or not, I don't know, but we will find out."

Quinn said the shooting took place after Secret Service agents identified a "suspicious individual," who appeared to have a firearm.

The man fled on foot after being approached by the officers, drew his weapon and opened fire, Quinn said.

Trump says he works out 'one minute a day' as he restores fitness award

AFP | Washington, United States

US President Donald Trump said Tuesday his exercise routine lasts at most a minute a day, as he signed an order to bring back a presidential fitness award for children.

Speculation has swirled about the health of Trump -- who was the oldest president ever inaugurated when he returned to power last year, and who turns 80 next month.

"I work out so much, like, about one minute a day, max. If

I'm lucky," Trump said before signing the proclamation in the Oval Office.

Trump also joked about his lack of exercise with Health Secretary Robert F. Kennedy Jr, who told a story about his father Robert F. Kennedy going on a 50-mile hike.

RFK Jr. said it would be a "breeze" for keen golfer Trump to do the same as "this guy walks nine miles a day on a golf course every weekend."

"When I'm not using the cart," Trump, who has frequent-

ly been pictured in a golf buggy, added in a mock-dramatic aside.

Golfers Gary Player and Bryson DeChambeau were with Trump for the signing of the order, which brings back the so-called Presidential Fitness Test award for schools.

Several school children were also alongside Trump as he cycled through a series of topics including graphic descriptions of protest deaths in Iran.

The president patted

one student on the arm and asked if he was a "strong person," to which the boy replied "yes, sir."

"You think you could take me in a fight?" Trump then said, before adding with a chuckle: "I think you could."

Republican Trump likes to boast about his physical prowess compared with his Demo-



Blake Lively, Justin Baldoni agree to end lengthy legal battle

AFP | New York, United States

Actor Blake Lively and "It Ends with Us" co-star Justin Baldoni on Monday settled their acrimonious years-long legal battle, avoiding a costly civil trial.

A joint statement provided to AFP said the parties had resolved their dispute -- launched after Lively accused Baldoni of inappropriate on-set behavior -- without disclosing any settlement figure.

Justin Baldoni

ly's initial complaint had said Baldoni -- who also directed the film -- had spoken inappropriately about his sex life and sought to alter the film to include sex scenes that were not in the script and had not been agreed to.

It also said producer Jamey Heath had watched Lively while she was topless, despite having been asked to turn away. It further said Baldoni waged a PR campaign to wreck Lively's reputation. "The end product -- the movie 'It Ends with Us' -- is a source of pride to all of us who worked to bring it to life," Baldoni and Lively's at-

torneys said in a joint statement. "We acknowledge the process presented challenges and recognize concerns raised by Ms. Lively deserved to be heard... It is our sincere hope that this brings closure and allows all involved to move forward constructively and in peace."

Hours after the announcement that the case was settled, Lively was all smiles as she unexpectedly appeared at the Met Gala in New York in a full ball gown that erupted in a cloud of pink, purple and yellow tulle.

Baldoni and the studio Wayfarer had previously counter-sued Lively and her husband Blake Lively attends the 2026 Met Gala celebrating "Costume Art" at the Metropolitan Museum of Art on May 04, 2026 in New York City



Ryan Reynolds with claims of extortion and defamation -- but a judge dismissed those claims last year.

Wayfarer previously insisted that neither the studio, its executives, nor its PR team did anything to retaliate against Lively.

A judge dismissed some of Lively's claims, but upheld her allegations of retaliation, which would have proceeded to trial on May 18.

Based on a best-selling novel by the US writer Colleen Hoover, "It Ends with Us" made more than \$350 million at the box office in 2024, making it one of the biggest hits of the year.