

# **JULY 2023 PARLIAMMENTARY BY-ELECTIONS**

## **Results and Analysis**

*Clarity* |

# July 2023 by-elections

By-elections are undoubtedly one of the most thrilling events on the UK political calendar for politicians, and this year we're in for a real treat. With three by-elections scheduled for the same day, the political climate is charged, and the stakes are high for all parties involved. However, the dynamic nature of politics, shifting voter sentiment, and the notorious unpredictability of UK by-election results mean that providing a clear snapshot of the by-elections is no easy task.

These three by-elections are all triggered by the resignation of the incumbent MPs, leading to vacant seats in the House of Commons. The former Prime Minister, Boris Johnson, resigned as the MP for Uxbridge & South Ruislip on June 9th, ahead of the report from the House of Commons Privileges Committee, which was due to be published later that day. In a show of solidarity with Johnson, Nigel Adams and Nadine Dorries both resigned as MPs for Selby & Ainsty and Mid Bedfordshire the following day. However, Dorries quickly reversed her decision, leaving the timeline for a by-election in her constituency uncertain.

The Somerton and Frome by-election has been a long time coming. David Warburton MP has been suspended from the Conservative party since April 2022 following multiple allegations of sexual harassment and the emergence of photos showing the MP posing alongside Class A drugs.

For the Labour and Liberal Democrat parties, winning any of these seats outside of a General Election would not only increase their representation in Parliament but also serve as a significant political victory over the Conservatives. As always, we have been keeping a close eye on these developments and are pleased to share the results and our analysis.

# **SEATS AND RESULTS**

# Selby and Ainsty

## North Yorkshire

MP elected at 2019 election: Nigel Adams (Con)

Electorate size: 78,398

Turnout at 2019 election: 72.0%

### Political history:

- The Conservatives held 60.3% of the vote share in 2019 with 33,995 votes.
- A mainly rural seat, the constituency was created at the 2010 general election and has been Conservative ever since.
- Nigel Adams took 49% of the vote in 2010 and increased his share at every subsequent poll.
- A Labour victory requires a swing in the vote share of 17.9 points - a net change of 18 in every 100 people switching sides.



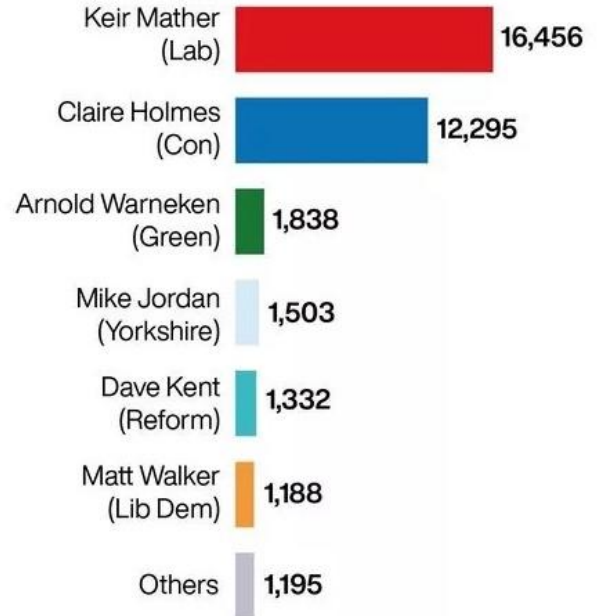
# Selby and Ainsty – LAB GAIN

Labour won the Selby and Ainsty by-election

- Labour overturned a Tory majority of more than 20,000.
- Keir Mather won with 16,456 ballots cast and a majority of 4,161 votes.
- It is the second biggest swing from Tory to Labour in parliamentary history at 23.7%
- Voter turnout at the election was 44.67%.

Profile of new MP:

- Keir Mather will become the youngest MP in the House of Commons at 25 years old
- He most recently worked as a senior public affairs adviser for the Confederation of British Industry and was a parliamentary researcher for current Shadow Health Secretary Wes Streeting from 2019 to 2020.
- His campaign centred on the cost of living crisis, public transport and NHS waiting lists, as well as local issues such as flooding and sewage, and anti-social behaviour.



# Somerton and Frome

## Somerset

MP elected at 2019 election: David Warburton (Con)

Electorate size: 85,866

Turnout at 2019 election: 75.6%

### Political history:

- The Conservatives held 55.8% of the vote share in 2019 with 36,230 votes.
- The constituency has historically been a two-horse race between the Conservatives and Liberal Democrats.
- The Tories held it from 1983 to 1997, and the Lib Dems from 1997 until 2015.
- A Lib Dem victory requires a swing in the vote share of 14.9 points.



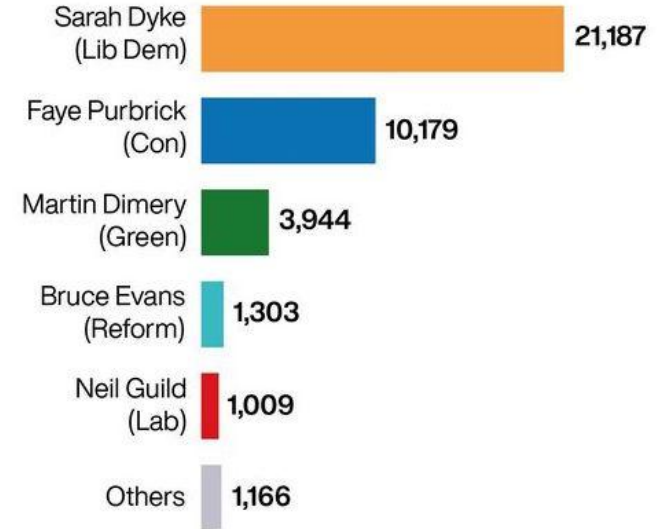
# Somerton and Frome – LD GAIN

The Liberal Democrats won the by-election in Somerton and Frome

- Lib Dems overturned a Tory majority of more than 19,000.
- Sarah Dyke won with 21,187 ballots cast and a majority of 11,000 votes. This was a swing of 29%.
- Voter turnout at the election was 44.23%.
- The result means that the Lib Dems have regained a seat that first won in 1997 and held for 18 years.

Profile of new MP:

- Sarah Dyke has represented Blackmoor Vale on the Somerset County Council since the 2022 local elections
- She has a background in the agricultural industry and is responsible for the council's portfolio for the environment and climate change.
- She was selected as the Lib Dem candidate back in May 2022 in anticipation of a by-election in the seat.



# Uxbridge and South Ruislip

## Greater London

MP elected at 2019 election: Boris Johnson (Con)

Electorate size: 70,365

Turnout at 2019 election: 68.5%

### Political history:

- The Conservatives held 52.6% of the vote share in 2019 with 25,351 votes.
- This constituency was established at the 2010 general election and has since only elected Tory candidates.
- The Conservative share of the vote has gone up at each election, from 48% in 2010 to 53% in 2019.
- Labour has always come second in this seat and gained 38% of the vote at the 2019 election.
- A Labour victory requires a swing in the vote share of 7.6 points.





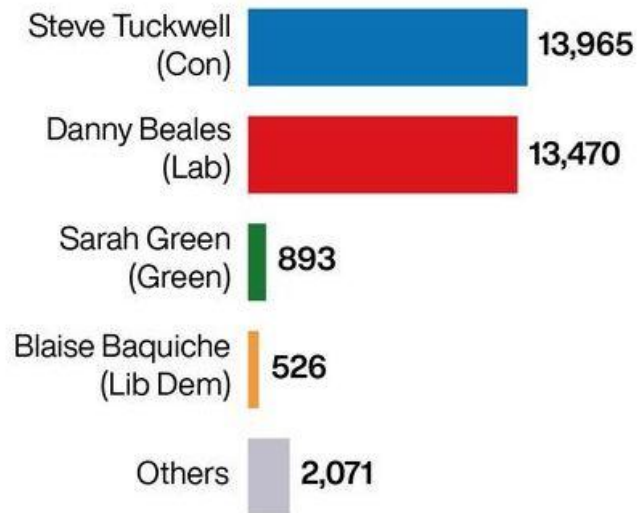
# Uxbridge and South Ruislip – TORY HOLD

The Conservatives maintained their seat at the Uxbridge and South Ruislip by-election

- Steve Tuckwell won with a majority of 495 votes, down from the previous election's 7,210 majority.
- Voter turnout at the election was 46.1%.
- The Labour swing was 6.7%

Profile of new MP:

- Steve Tuckwell has been a member of Hillingdon London Borough Council for South Ruislip ward since 2018, and is a lifelong resident of South Ruislip.
- His campaign focused on local issues and saw the by-election vote as a 'referendum' on ULEZ, which he has campaigned against.



# ANALYSIS

# Tories on the ropes as opposition support grows

The Conservative defeats in Selby and Ainsty, and in Somerset and Frome, are an indicator that what conventional polls have been showing for some time are accurate: that Keir Starmer is on course to deliver a Labour majority in the next general election. Not only have the Labour and Liberal Democrat parties increased their seat representation in the House of Commons, they've also managed to overturn considerable Tory majorities in these two constituencies.

Labour's victory in Selby and Ainsty is possibly the most significant result of the by-elections. The seat was 237th on Labour's target list for the next general election, and their victory is the largest Conservative majority overturned by the party in a by-election since 1945. This is a strong sign for a future Labour government, as they achieved a swing of 17.9% to win the seat, greater than the nationwide change of 12% to form a majority at the next general election.

The Tories defeat in Somerton and Frome also poses a problem for Rishi Sunak as it shows that even in seats where Conservative MPs face no threat from Labour, they have a new challenge in the way of the Lib Dems, who managed to overturn a Tory majority of over 19,000 votes.

One surprise to emerge from the by-elections is the Conservative victory in the seat of Uxbridge and Ruislip. Despite Labour being the favourite to win the election, with even Tory Party insiders suggesting defeat was inevitable, the Conservatives managed to maintain its seat, albeit by a very slim majority of 495 votes. Labour have blamed this defeat on the expansion of the ultra-low emission zone (Ulez); while the Labour candidate made efforts to distance himself from Sadiq Khan's scheme, it was not enough to convince more voters to swing to Labour. This also serves as a warning to the Conservatives, who may need to rethink their green policies to avoid repeating Labour's misfortune.

Notwithstanding the difficulties of the reading too much of the national picture from by-elections, what does this mean for the future, with a general election within the next 15 months?

In keeping with his steady-as-you-go approach, Sunak immediately came out and said “we’ve got to double down, stick to our plan and deliver for people. That’s what I heard when I was out on the doorsteps and that’s what we’re going to do.” While Starmer played up to the Selby result saying only Labour “can give the country its hope, its optimism and its future back” after 13 years of “Tory Chaos”. Davey joked the LibDems “needed a bigger tractor” as the Party’s prospects in the South West look promising once again. The results are therefore likely to see the parties stick to their existing strategies.

With each party able to claim some sort of success on the night, it may not be immediately obvious who the clear winner was. What is certain is it was a bad night for Sunak, with the Selby result being the standout result, and the Conservatives facing pressure on multiple fronts. Key reshuffles ahead of the autumn party conference season are now expected and will help shape the battle lines for a huge political year to come.