GENERAL ELECTION 2024

Headland

What to watch out for

The 2024 General Election campaign has felt like a done deal for quite some time, despite a number of interesting plot twists. The polls are pointing to an overwhelming Labour majority, but there could still be drama on 4th July. To help you make sense of it all, here is Headland's guide on what to watch out for throughout the day and into the next morning.

07:00
Polling opens

In the face of an immovable Labour poll lead, and under assault from the Lib Dems and Reform, the Conservatives redirected campaign resources away from marginals and towards ultra-safe seats. Because of this, many voters, especially those in the so-called Red Wall with slim Tory majorities, are unlikely to have seen many blue rosettes during the campaign. Polling day will be no different as the Tories instead pour resources into the seats of at-risk Cabinet ministers – including the Prime Minister – to try limit the scale of defeat.

Another interesting plotline for this election will be turnout. For the first time ever, everyone voting in person on 4th July will have to show valid photo ID. This additional barrier, coupled with a malaise amongst voters uninspired by any candidate, has some pollsters predicting the lowest General Election turnout in modern history. It's for these reasons that the Tories are working so hard at motivating their base.

Whatever happens today, believe little of the party-political spin. What matters most is the exit poll…

Where to watch

BBC

Laura Kuenssberg and Clive Myrie will front the BBC's election night coverage, replacing Huw Edwards. The move makes Kuenssberg the first woman to anchor the BBC on election night. Pollster, John Curtice will also return to provide analysis. Nick Robinson, Rachel Burden and Henry Zeffman will helm Radio 4 and, from midnight, Radio 5 Live.

ITV

Tom Bradby will again lead ITV's election night coverage, this time joined by former Secretaries of State-turned-podcasters, Ed Balls and George Osborne, as well as ex-SNP Leader, Nicola Sturgeon. Balls will return at 06:00 with Susanna Reid for Good Morning Britain and will be joined by former Chancellors, Gordon Brown and Kwasi Kwarteng.

Sky News

Kay Burley will anchor election night for the twelfth time for Sky. She will be joined by Ed Conway and Beth Rigby. Mayor of Greater Manchester, Andy Burnham will join former Leader of the Scottish Conservatives and Rigby's Co-Host on Electoral Dysfunction, Baroness Ruth Davidson, to provide guest analysis.

Channel 4

Channel 4 News Anchor, Krishnan Guru-Murthy will lead coverage alongside The News Agents Co-Host and former BBC Newsnight Presenter, Emily Maitlis. Emily will be joined throughout the night by co-hosts, Alastair Campbell and Rory Stewart, as well as "some familiar faces from Gogglebox" providing their takes on the election campaign.

22:00
Exit poll published

The exit poll is released as soon as the polls close. In previous elections it has more accurately predicted the outcome of the election compared to the polls, although it's not perfect (in 2017, for example, the first take of the exit poll correctly predicted the Conservatives would be the largest party, but stopped short of saying there would be a hung Parliament).

In the absence of a major shock, all eyes will be on the scale of the Labour majority. The scale of Labour's predicted win is likely to define the narrative the following day and anything less than what Tony Blair was able to achieve will be spun as a disappointment. Anything bigger will be called a Tory wipeout.

The exit poll aside, settle in for a long night. Using the expected declaration times and the average of the MRPs, it's estimated that we'll have the definitive results by around 4am.

23:00
The first results



The first results will begin to trickle in. Usually, it's a battle between Sunderland and Newcastle to declare first, with the latter claiming victory in 2017 and 2019, respectively.

For 2024, however, Newcastle appears to have ruled itself out of declaring first, claiming that it does not expect to declare the winner of the **Newcastle upon Tyne Central and West** seat until about 01:15 on 5 July. This is, in part, because of a redrawing of the constituency boundaries which means that Newcastle will be reliant on ballot boxes being sent in from new wards in neighbouring North Tyneside. In contrast, Sunderland is expected to start declaring at or before midnight and to have all its three seats (**Houghton and Sunderland South, Washington and Gateshead South** and **Sunderland Central**) declared by 01:00.

Whoever wins, expect to see TV footage of kids doing shuttle sprints carrying ballot boxes back and forth to counters. The early results will most likely go to Labour but keep an eye on how Reform fare in traditionally Labour heartlands.

01:00 - 03:00
The "Red Wall" returns?

The second big moment of the night will likely see seats in the Red Wall return to Labour. Lost in the 2019 General Election to Boris Johnson, many seats in the North Midlands and Northern England are set to return to Labour as the Tories retreat to protect more affluent seats in the South. **Darlington** (currently held by Conservative Peter Gibson and one-time host to Truss and Sunak for the leadership husting) is expected to be the first such seat to declare. The Tories have tried to utilise Boris Johnson, who remains popular in the area, but many Tory activists have said that their party has all but "abandoned" them in the Red Wall. If **Darlington** turns red, it's clear Labour's stronghold in the north is returning.

But keep an eye on events outside England, too. Often, the seats in **South Lanarkshire** declare fairly early. But no matter which seat it is, look out for the first result in Scotland's Central Belt (a former Labour stronghold that the SNP swept in 2015). Scottish Labour and the SNP are currently neck-and-neck in national vote share across Scotland, but Labour's vote is concentrated in this area. If Labour is to make significant progress, as many polls have suggested, they will be looking to win a majority of these seats. The first result will give us an indication if that is possible.

03:00 - 05:00
The scale of the majority becomes clear

Results will come thick and fast, and the picture in the main English battlegrounds will become clearer. If the Tories' safer seats can just about hold, such as the seats of future leadership hopefuls Kemi Badenoch and Laura Trott in **North West Essex** and **Sevenoaks** respectively, then the narrative moves away from a Tory "annihilation". But by that point we could see a number of other Cabinet members lose their seat, including Alex Chalk in **Cheltenham** and Mark Harper in **Forest of Dean**.

06:00
The Stragglers

With almost all results now declared there are just a handful of seats remaining. By this point enough seats will have been declared to indicate whether Labour had a good night or a really, really good night. Some key seats will declare relatively late, including those in central London where Keir Starmer's position on the Gaza conflict has been proving challenging for his party on the doorstep. It's unlikely that Labour will lose seats like **Bethnal Green and Stepney**, but voter frustration could prove to be one of the other notable storylines in this election, with many votes going to independents.



Seats to watch

The beauty of the British electoral system is that even the most senior political figures can lose their seat, and this election is arguably the most precarious for the Tories' political beasts.

One former Cabinet member who knows this well is the former Liberal Democrat Deputy Prime Minister, Nick Clegg. He lost **Sheffield Hallam** dramatically in 2017 to Labour, marking the first time Labour had ever taken the seat since the constituency's creation in 1885. This year he has reportedly been pumping tens of thousands of pounds of his own money into the area to help the Liberal Democrats win it back (one of the few true Labour vs Liberal Democrat battles this election).

Following the latest boundary review however, constituencies have been redrawn which has complicated the picture for every party. The changes appeared at first to have worked in the Tories' favour: Labour lost two seats, the SNP forfeited three and Plaid Cymru lost two of its four. In comparison, the Conservatives gained seven seats.

The below seats are just some of the more revealing and insightful results to look out for on the night.

Conservative

North Herefordshire
Sir Bill Wiggin (25,856 majority)

It's not only Labour fighting off the Greens. North Herefordshire is one of the Greens' four target seats, and they say they're "neck and neck" with the Conservatives. Although Labour is polling above the Greens according to national polls, the party has not designated the seat a "battleground", so resources are slim. The Conservatives remain bullish that the Greens' presence will split the vote, but a highly coordinated tactical voting push could threaten them for the first time in this true-blue seat.

Clacton
Giles Watling (24,702 majority)

Clacton was the only seat won by UKIP in the 2015 General Election, returning Tory defector Douglas Carswell following his 2014 by-election victory. Retaken by the Conservatives in 2017, by 2019 Clacton was a Conservative seat with a massive majority, assisted by the Brexit Party's decision to stand down candidates in Conservative-held seats. Despite this, few voters have said they'll remain loyal to the Tories and instead are turning to Reform in their droves. It's for this reason that Labour reportedly pulled all their resources out of the area – they know it's a lost battle. If Farage can win the seat (his eighth attempt to become an MP) expect this to be one of the leading stories for right-wing papers the following morning.

Basildon and Billericay
John Baron (20,412 majority)

Before Clacton is announced, we're expecting Basildon and Billericay shortly after midnight. The MRPs are completely split between Conservative, Labour and Reform. If it goes Reform it'll set the tone for some of the other Reform marginals over the night. It will also be an early blow for the Conservatives as it's party Chairman Richard Holden competing for the seat this election after John Baron stepped down.

Portsmouth North
Penny Mordaunt (15,780 majority)

Despite the national polls, Penny Mordaunt has a reason to be defiant. Her personal ratings are above many of her peers nationally, and she remains popular locally. The Liberal Democrats are concentrating their efforts on Winchester and Chichester, where they have a chance of unseating Gillian Keegan, so are unlikely to mount much of a challenge. Moreover, the expansion of Portsmouth University has seemingly had the biggest impact in Portsmouth South, where most of the students live. But, if none of this fails to protect Penny, expect other Tory big beasts to fall, fast.

Montgomeryshire and Glyndŵr
Craig Williams (12,138 majority)

Previously seen as a guaranteed win for the Tories, Montgomeryshire experienced a few tumultuous days in the campaign. Williams, having been caught up in the election gambling scandal, had his support formally withdrawn from CCHQ. This meant that while he's standing as a Conservative candidate, he'll have no central resources for his campaign, including ads and social media. Previously the safest seat for the Tories in Wales and the only Welsh seat projected as a Tory win early in the campaign, it now looks ripe for Labour's taking.

Godalming and Ash
Jeremy Hunt (8,817 majority)

In modern history, no Chancellor has ever lost their seat at a General Election, making the battle for this seat one of the most compelling storylines. Formerly South West Surrey, the seat was redrawn giving Hunt a slightly higher advantage. Despite this, he has suggested he is facing a "knife edge" battle to fight off the Liberal Democrats who have made the seat one of their priority targets.

Vale of Glamorgan
Alun Cairns (3,562 majority)

A true bellwether seat, the Vale of Glamorgan has been won by every party of Government in both Cardiff Bay and Westminster since it was created in 1983. Polling and history suggest it looks set to swing red this year.

Warrington South
Andy Carter (2,010 majority)

Warrington South is yet another bellwether, specifically for England. A tight swing seat with often only a thousand votes between the Conservatives and Labour. The local candidate did not intend to stand for the seat, but u-turned in June when it was clear the Conservatives weren't able to field a replacement. This time, however, Reform is likely to eat away at much of the Tory lead.

Burnley
Antony Higginbotham (1,352 majority)

Before it changed hands in 2019, Burnley was last blue in 1910 and had remained either Labour or Liberal Democrat-held until the last election. Winning it back would be emblematic of how Labour has managed to turn things around in such a short space of time (in a largely pro-Brexit seat, too).

Labour

Bristol Central
Thangam Debbonaire (28,219 majority)

Formed from what used to be Bristol West - where Thangam Debbonaire has been the Labour MP for nine years – it was meant to be a safe win for Labour's Culture Secretary hopeful. However, anger over Starmer's stance on Gaza and a perceived shift to the right could lead to the Greens' Carla Denyer being elected. The Greens picked up all the available council seats in the constituency at the locals in May, too. One of the few Labour losses expected.

Rutherglen
Michael Shanks (9,446 majority)

Less than a year since the Rutherglen and Hamilton West by-election, incumbent Michael Shanks will face the SNP's Katy Loudon yet again for the newly redrawn constituency of Rutherglen. Since 2010 the winning MP has alternated between Labour and SNP. When Labour reclaimed the seat last year, Keir Starmer heralded the victory as a sign that Labour was reclaiming Scotland and is set for power. As the first seat expected to be announced in Scotland, it will set the tone. If Labour can keep this seat, it's a clear sign that the SNP's support has not rebounded since the party's leadership debacles.



SNP

Dundee Central
Chris Law (12,259 majority)

Considered a stronghold of Scottish independence since 2014, the city faces an unexpected shift. Until Sturgeon's abrupt resignation, it seemed unlikely that Labour could do much but squeeze the Scottish Tories to win back a smattering of pro-union seats. But SNP fatigue seems to be taking precedent above independence amongst voters.

Glasgow South
Stewart McDonald (9,005 majority)

Held by the SNP since 2015, Glasgow South is part of Scotland's central belt where Labour has been pouring resources. Polls suggest that swing voters seem more driven by disapproval over the performance of those in power than by enthusiasm for Labour. This is a left-wing constituency which has its doubts over Starmer. But if Labour wins here then it is clear voters are more interested in seeing the Tories lose, than see independence in the immediate term.