

BSA 43 | Who supports Reform?

Addendum

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Introduction

This chapter's analysis of the character of support for Reform was based on data collected in September and October 2025 as part of the latest annual British Social Attitudes (BSA) survey. However, in May 2026, we undertook a further wave of data collection via NatCen's Opinion Panel, which comprises people who have responded to previous BSA surveys and indicated a willingness to participate (either online or by phone) in further follow-up surveys (Jessop, 2018). This exercise coincided with devolved elections in Scotland and Wales and local elections in much of England, elections that between them represented the biggest mid-term test of the parties' popularity in the current parliament. Although by this point Reform's standing in the polls was somewhat lower than at the time of the BSA survey, the party still registered very substantial gains in the elections, and especially so in the English local elections outside London (Curtice, 2026). The results thus confirmed that Reform were posing a major challenge to the conventional structure of British party politics.

This addendum utilises the data collected at the time of these elections to supplement and update our original analysis. In particular, it (i) casts further light on the role that low levels of trust and confidence in how Britain is being governed play in fostering support for the party, and (ii) assesses the relative importance of these perceptions in determining the character of the party's support and people's outlook on so-called 'culture wars' issues.

A total of 1,985 people aged 16 and over living in the UK were interviewed between 30 April and 31 May 2026. The data have been weighted to reflect the known demographic characteristics of the population and the attitudinal profile of the original BSA surveys to which panellists originally responded. Note that, in contrast to the original chapter, those aged 16 or 17 are included in the analysis as are those living in Northern Ireland. In our analysis of these data, Reform supporters are those who, in May, named the party in response to one of the same set of questions that were used to ascertain party support on the original BSA survey.

1.1 Political trust and confidence

One of the key findings of the chapter was that Reform supporters were distinguished by a low level of trust and confidence in how Britain is governed. This is reflected in their responses to three questions. They were especially likely to say that the way Britain is governed is in need of a 'great

deal' of improvement. At the same time, many say they 'almost never' trust governments of any party to put the needs of the country above the interests of their party, while they also feel much the same about whether politicians tell the truth when they are in a tight corner. However, because these questions were not included on the 2025 survey, in this instance we had to rely on data collected by the 2024 BSA a few weeks after that year's general election. The new data enable us to update that analysis.

Among the public as a whole, levels of trust and confidence were already at or near a record low in 2024 (Curtice et al., 2025). Our new data confirm that, two years into the current parliament, this remains the case. Indeed, as many as 83% now say the system of governing Britain could be improved 'quite a lot' or 'a great deal', four points up on 2024 and the highest figure to be recorded at any time since the question was first asked in 1973. Similarly, just 9% now say that they trust governments to put the nation's interests first 'just about always' or 'most of the time', the lowest proportion since the question was first asked in 1986. Meanwhile, only 5% say they always or mostly trust politicians to tell the truth, a figure in line with the record low reported in 2024.

This mood would seem to be propitious for a party like Reform that is attempting to challenge the conventional political order. Indeed, our new data confirm that those who support Reform are particularly low on political trust and confidence. As many as 68% say that the system of governing Britain is in need of 'a great deal' of improvement, well above the 43% figure among the public as a whole. Two-thirds (66%) say they 'almost never' trust governments to put the nation's needs first, compared with 45% of the general public. Meanwhile, 71% state that they 'almost never' trust politicians to tell the truth in a tight corner, a view shared by only 58% of the general public. That said, in each case the proportion of Reform supporters expressing these views is a little lower than in 2024, while in two instances the gap between Reform supporters and the general public is now somewhat narrower.¹ Perhaps this indicates that discontent with how Britain is governed has become a little less important as a motivation for backing Reform than was the case two years ago?

1.2 Discontent or ideology?

In any event, this new evidence on levels of political trust and confidence creates a further opportunity to address the central question posed by the chapter, that is, whether Reform supporters are primarily distinguished by their level of discontent or whether it is their ideological outlook that is the

¹ The proportion of Reform supporters who almost never trust politicians is down by nine points on 2024, while the equivalent figure for believing that Britain's system of government needs a great deal of improvement is seven points and that for almost never trusting governments is two points. In 2024, Reform supporters were 36 points more likely than the general public to believe the system of government needs a great deal of improvement, compared with 25 points now, while they were 20 points more likely almost never to trust politicians (now 13 points).

more distinctive. The chapter showed that Reform supporters are much more numerous among those with an authoritarian or socially conservative outlook, as measured by their responses to questions that form a ‘libertarian-authoritarian’ scale included on each year’s BSA. This finding is replicated by our new survey. It shows that support for Reform now stands at 28% among the one-third most authoritarian of our respondents, compared with 13% among the middle third, and just 3% among the one-third most libertarian.² This 25 point difference between those at the two end points of the scale is similar to the 29 point one reported in the chapter. Meanwhile, as in 2025, the gap between libertarians and authoritarians in their level of support for Reform is much bigger than the six point difference between those who are among the one-third most left-wing and the one-third most right-wing (a figure unchanged from 2025). Reform supporters continue to be distinguished by their social conservatism rather than by their being particularly right-wing on issues of economic inequality.

However, our new data make it possible to test the relative importance of people’s social conservatism and their levels of trust and confidence in shaping who now supports Reform.³ Table 1 shows the level of support for Reform broken down by people’s evaluations of Britain’s system of government and where they stand on our libertarian-authoritarian scale. It reveals that, irrespective of where they stand on our libertarian-authoritarian scale, those who believe the system of governing Britain needs ‘a great deal’ of improvement are more likely than those who feel it needs little or no improvement to support Reform. For example, among those at the authoritarian end of our scale, those who believe that how Britain is governed could be improved ‘a great deal’ are, at 34%, 21 points more likely than those who feel it at most only requires improvement in ‘small ways’ (13%) to say they support Reform.

At the same time, however, irrespective of people’s evaluation of Britain’s system of government, those at the authoritarian end of the scale are much more likely than those of a more libertarian disposition to support Reform. So, for example, among those who believe that how Britain is governed needs a ‘great deal’ of improvement, those at the authoritarian end of our scale are, at 34%, 28 points more likely than those at the libertarian end (6%) to be Reform supporters. Moreover, the differences between authoritarians and libertarians in their level of support for Reform (see the last column of the table) are more marked than they are between those with a different outlook

² Respondent’s position on the scale is determined by the answers they gave to the component questions on their original BSA interview.

³ The analysis that follows thus supplements the analysis in Table 8 of the chapter, where, in the absence of data in the 2025 survey on political trust and confidence, discontent was measured by people’s level of (dis)satisfaction with the NHS. Our May 2026 data indicate that dissatisfaction with the NHS continues to be more prevalent among Reform supporters (60%, the same as in 2025) than among the general public (48%).

on how Britain is governed (see the last row).⁴ Our previous conclusion (based on an analysis where discontent was measured by satisfaction with the health service) that support for Reform is primarily structured by ideology rather than discontent is upheld by this further analysis.⁵

Table 1. Support for Reform by Libertarian/Authoritarian position and perceptions of how Britain is being governed

% support Reform	Libertarian	Centre	Authoritarian	Authoritarian - Libertarian
System of governing Britain could...				
...not be improved/be improved in small ways	0	4	13	+13
...be improved quite a lot	1	10	23	+22
...be improved a great deal	6	18	34	+28
Great deal – not improved/small ways	+6	+14	+21	

Unweighted bases can be found in Appendix Table 1 at the end of this addendum.

The social conservatism of Reform supporters is evident in their attitudes towards equal opportunities for minority groups. This topic was also not addressed by the 2025 BSA survey, although in this instance it was possible in the chapter to cite data from a NatCen Opinion Panel survey conducted in July 2025. The latest data confirm the picture painted by those earlier data, that is, that Reform supporters are much more likely than the general public to believe that attempts to give equal opportunities to various minority groups have ‘gone too far’. In the case of transgender people, no less than 79% of Reform supporters take that view, compared with rather less than half (46%) of the general public. In the case of lesbian, gay and bisexual people the figures are 58% and 31% respectively, while for Black and Asian people they are 49% and 20%.

Meanwhile, using the example of equal opportunities for lesbian, gay, and bisexual people, we can also show that people’s attitudes towards equalities policies are related to their likelihood of supporting Reform even after taking

⁴ This conclusion is supported by the results of a logistic regression analysis, which shows that both position on the libertarian-authoritarian scale and views on how Britain is governed are independently associated with support for Reform, but that the impact of the former (as measured by the Wald score) is greater than that of the latter.
⁵ The results are much the same if we replicate the analysis in Table 1 using trust in government instead of perceptions of how well Britain is being governed.

into account their evaluation of Britain's system of government (see Table 2). Among those who think the system of governing Britain needs a 'great deal' of improvement, for example, support for Reform is, at 35%, 28 points higher among those who think equal opportunities have gone too far than those who think they have not gone far enough (7%). Moreover, as in the case of our libertarian-authoritarian scale, the level of support for Reform differs more between those with different views on equalities policies (see the last column) than it does between those with divergent evaluations of Britain's system of government (see bottom row).⁶ Once again, the ideological distinctiveness of Reform supporters comes to the fore.

Table 2. Support for Reform by attitudes towards how equal opportunities for lesbian, gay and bisexual people and perceptions of how Britain is being governed

% support Reform	Equal opportunities for lesbian, gay and bisexual people have...			
	Not gone far enough	About right	Gone too far	Gone too far – not far enough
System of governing Britain could...				
...not be improved/be improved in small ways	0	3	16	+16
...be improved quite a lot	4	7	20	+16
...be improved a great deal	7	17	35	+28
Great deal – not improved/small ways	+7	+14	+19	

Unweighted bases can be found in Appendix Table 2 at the end of this addendum.

The same picture emerges if we examine attitudes towards the issue that was central to the history of the foundation of Reform - Brexit. As was evident in our 2025 data, support for Reform is, at 40%, much higher among those who, in another referendum, would vote to stay out of the EU than it is among those who would vote to rejoin, where support for the party stands at just 5%. And, as Table 3 shows (see the last column and the last row), this indicator of people's ideological outlook is also more strongly related to Reform

⁶ This assertion is also supported by logistic regression analysis. While both attitudes towards equal opportunities for lesbian, gay and bisexual people and evaluations of Britain's system of government are independently associated with support for Reform, the former is (as measured by the Wald score) the more strongly related.

support than are evaluations of Britain's system of government.⁷ True, among those who would vote to stay out of the EU those who believe that Britain's system of government needs a 'great deal' of improvement are 29 points more likely than those who feel that at most it needs improving in 'small ways' to say they support Reform. However, among those who believe Britain's system of government is in need of a 'great deal' of improvement, support for Reform is as much as 39 points higher among those who would vote to stay out of the EU than it is among those who would back rejoining.

Table 3. Support for Reform by Current EU Vote Intention and Perceptions of How Britain is Governed

% support Reform	Rejoin	Stay Out	Stay Out- Rejoin
System of governing Britain could...			
...not be improved/be improved in small ways	2	20	+18
...be improved quite a lot	3	33	+30
...be improved a great deal	10	49	+39
Great deal – not improved/small ways	+8	+29	

⁷ This is also evident in a logic regression analysis of these data.

Conclusion

Support for Reform is partly a reflection of widespread voter discontent with the perceived performance of Britain's system of government and low levels of trust in politics and politicians. To that extent, it might be regarded as a 'protest' vote that could disappear as rapidly as it has arisen, should voters' discontent begin to be assuaged. Indeed, according to the opinion polls⁸, support for the party is now well down on where it stood last autumn. However, our further analysis confirms that support for Reform is rooted above all in a social conservatism that is reflected, inter alia, in a sceptical attitude towards equalities policies and support for Brexit, as well as the party's pronounced opposition to immigration. These are issues on which Reform supporters have very distinctive attitudes that serve to set them apart from many of their fellow citizens. Unless and until they are convinced that their concerns about these 'culture wars' issues are being addressed by government and/or other parties, it seems likely that the party will continue to be a not insignificant player in Britain's now fragmented political landscape.

⁸ Wikipedia (nd), 'Opinion Polling for the next United Kingdom general election'. Available at https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Opinion_polling_for_the_next_United_Kingdom_general_election

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Appendix: unweighted cell sizes

Appendix Table 1. Unweighted bases for Table 1

Unweighted Bases	Libertarian	Centre	Authoritarian
System of governing Britain could...			
...not be improved/be improved in small ways	101	138	55
...be improved quite a lot	248	290	201
...be improved a great deal	162	288	362

Appendix Table 2. Unweighted bases for Table 2

	Equal opportunities for lesbian, gay and bisexual people have...		
	Not gone far enough	About right	Gone too far
System of governing Britain could...			
...not be improved/be improved in small ways	37	199	65
...be improved quite a lot	163	415	181
...be improved a great deal	122	343	373

Appendix Table 3. Unweighted bases for Table 3

	Rejoin	Stay Out
System of governing Britain could...		
...not be improved/be improved in small ways	217	57
...be improved quite a lot	547	169
...be improved a great deal	447	311

