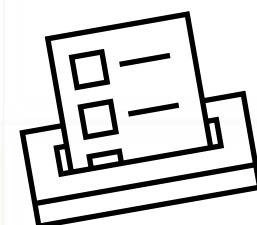


ELECTION SPECIAL

Welcome to Weber Shandwick's weekly election newsletter. Every Friday in the election run-up, our Public Affairs specialists across the UK will be taking a close look into the hottest political trends and upcoming announcements, shedding light on the latest gossip and demystifying policy jargon to help you understand what matters - and how to respond.

This week, we delve into issues ranging from the (somewhat shaky?) return of Nigel Farage, to Treasury maths and Labour woes in Wales. As polling data continues to trickle in and televised debates take centre stage, Jodie Hedley, our Head of PA in Scotland, gives her take on how the landscape is shaping up.



THE POLITICAL FORECAST

CUTTING THROUGH

RISHI'S DUBIOUS MATHS

For a man who wants everyone to study maths until they're 18, Rishi's TV debate sums didn't quite add up. Alongside an NHS waiting list miscalculation, his most memorable line was that "independent Treasury officials" found families would be £2,000 worse off under Labour. But it's since emerged that these are *not* Treasury figures, and Sunak had been explicitly warned by civil servants not to present them as such. So is Rishi desperate, a "liar", or strategic? And will future costing claims keep civil servants (unusually) in the election spotlight?



GETH-ING OUT OF HAND

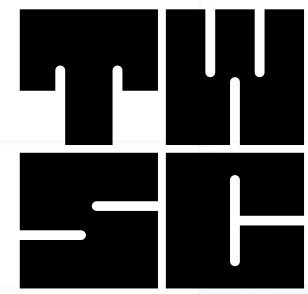
After just twelve weeks in post, Welsh First Minister Vaughan Gething has lost a no-confidence vote following a series of scandals. The vote is non-binding, and Gething insists he will "carry on" with his duty. Calls to step down will grow - creating a big headache for Starmer, and a big attack opportunity for Sunak.



D-DAY DISASTER FOR THE PM

Rishi cut short his attendance at D-Day Commemorations in France to record an ITV interview at home, and the optics of the gaffe are extremely bleak for the PM considering his National Service announcement. Reform's Nigel Farage (set to appear on tonight's BBC debate) will seek to capitalise by appealing to the patriotic cohort of traditionally Tory voters - exactly what Sunak feared. We can't help but feel sorry Penny Mordaunt, a Royal Navy reservist herself, who will have to defend Rishi's choice. Labour called it a "dereliction of duty" to miss what is likely the last commemoration with survivors present.





COOLING DOWN

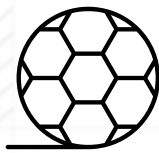


MIGRATION INDIGNATION

With Farage deeming this “the immigration election” (and threatening to poach the votes of right-wing Tories for Reform), the Conservatives have pledged to cap the number of visas available to migrants. Numbers will reduce each year based on recommendations from the Migration Advisory Committee, and (unusually) an annual MP vote. Labour is seizing the moment to highlight that net migration has trebled - but notably refuse to set their own migration target.

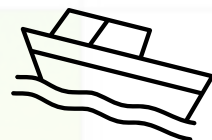
THE RETURN OF ‘TRIPLE JOB ROSS’

Douglas Ross will now run for MP in Aberdeenshire North and Moray East, despite saying he would stand down amidst repeated criticism for juggling three roles (MP, MSP and part-time linesman at football matches). The announcement sparked renewed discussions about “nasty Tories” as the incumbent David Duguid, who is recovering from spinal surgery, had said he was “looking forward to campaigning” (in an area he’s been MP for since 2017) - but was not selected.



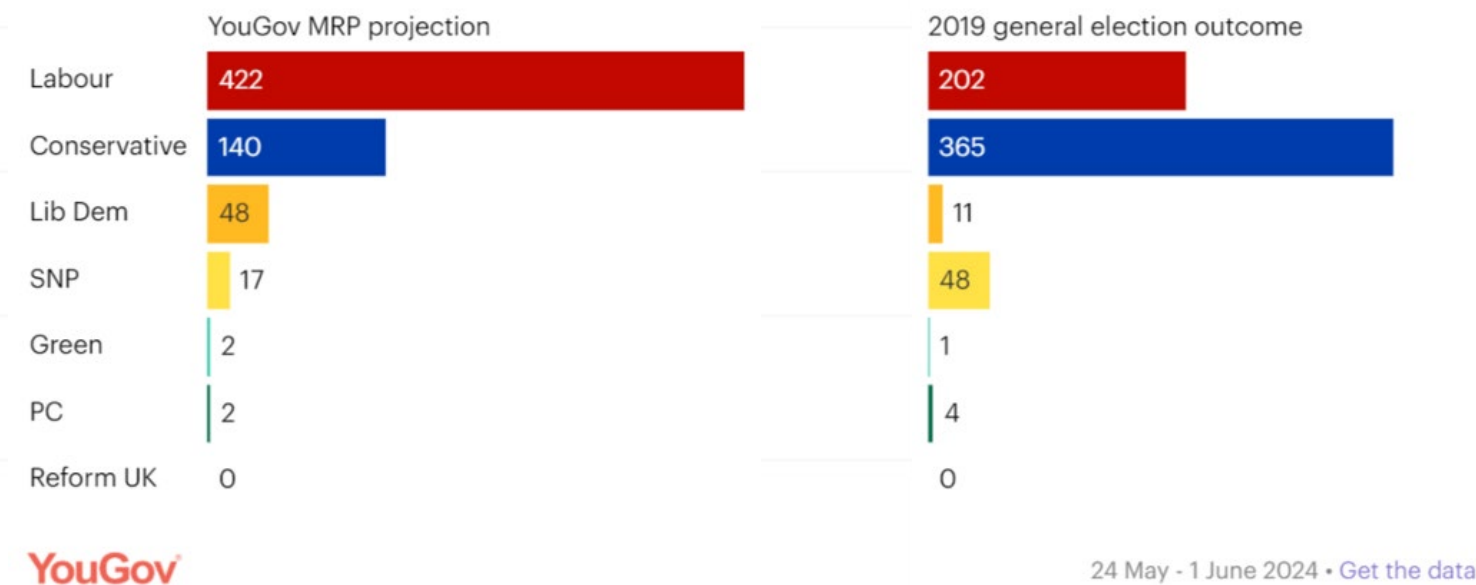
LIKE A LIB DEM TO WATER

Continuing their nautical stunt trend, Lib Dem Deputy Leader Daisy Cooper “photobombed” Sunak on the campaign trail, sailing past him on a boat filled with Lib Dem campaigners. A Lib Dem spokesperson said: “This is just another small boat Rishi Sunak can’t deal with.” Sunak later posted: “Classic Lib Dems, always selling voters down the river.” We’re in oar of this light-hearted banter; let’s hope it triumphs over vicious gossip-fuelled campaigning.



POLL POSITIONS

This week, YouGov released its first MRP of the 2024 election campaign. MRPs are an increasingly accurate form of polling and YouGov is a leader here - particularly when it comes to understanding undecided voter intention - so listen up!



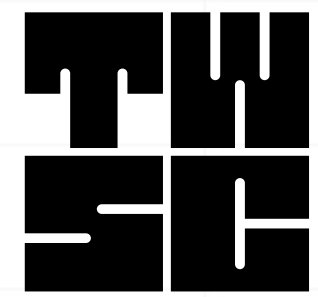
It puts Labour at 422 (+220), Conservatives at 140 (-225), Lib Dems at 48 (+37) and SNP at 17 (-31) - meaning senior figures like Jeremy Hunt, Grant Shapps, and Michelle Donelan would lose their seats.

CAMPAIGN MOMENT: FARAGE SHAKES THINGS UP

Nigel Farage making an unexpected reappearance (re-re-re-appearance?) in British politics was always going to liven things up. It seems the controversial former UKIP Leader and MEP has ditched Trump to contest the seat of Clacton as Leader of Reform UK. However, Farage’s personal campaign launch did not go smoothly, with a protester throwing a milkshake all over him.

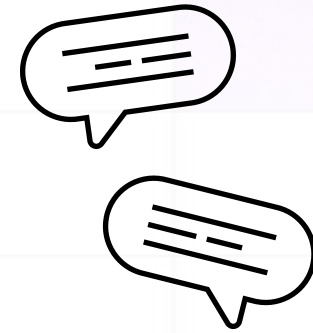
While newspaper photographers jumped for joy - and Farage laughed the episode off later in the day - the stunt *does* raise the question of candidate safety on the ever-unpredictable campaign trail.





QUOTE OF THE WEEK

'It's got a fridge!'



Deputy Labour Leader, Angela Rayner, on her battle bus

BUSINESS BULLETIN

With net zero still a critical dividing line between parties, the energy industry is a major player in the election landscape - felt nowhere more keenly than in North Sea. Labour's proposed ban on new licences led to three big energy players postponing production at the Buchan oilfield this week, citing uncertainty over Labour's fiscal policies and Green Prosperity Plan funded by industry windfall taxes. After much sitting on the fence, the SNP has now come out and suggested a U-Turn on their "presumption against new licenses" - prompting accusations of Kate Forbes "rewriting history". It's all adding fuel (...) to a fiery debate mobilising vocal unions, energy communities and green activists.



PPC PATTERN*

**A title from our Scottish Public Affairs colleagues.*

Patter = a word used to describe someone's general conversation, wit, and mannerisms.

As Partygate's-Chief-Investigator-controversially-turned-Starmer's-Chief-of-Staff (and breathe!), Sue Gray has recently become something of a household name. But can her son do the same?

Introducing Liam Conlon, Labour candidate for the new Beckenham and Penge constituency. Originally looking like a safe Conservative seat, it is now predicted to be one of the closest marginal constituencies in London.

Liam's focus will be on championing the NHS, disability rights and youth centres - partly inspired by the care he received from hospitals after his own life-changing accident aged 13, which left him unable to walk for four years.

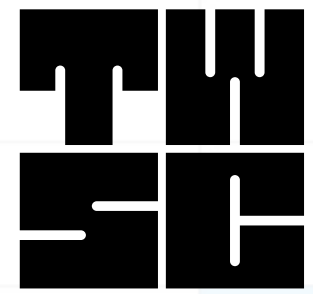


50 Shades of Gray

TIKTOK TIME

Sky News Deputy Political Editor Sam Coates had a surprise call from none other than Grant Shapps during a live broadcast this week. As Coates was presenting some rather grim polling results for Shapps, he answered the call with, "Hello Grant Shapps, you're live on Sky News", before informing Shapps that the latest YouGov projection showed him losing his seat. After a moment of awkward silence and a few beeps, the Defence Secretary hung up...

Later, Shapps joked about the unexpected call and likened Sky News to a Michael McIntyre prank show. He said that he hadn't realised he was live [Editors' note: we aren't so sure of that, Grant] - decide for yourself **here**.



SPOTLIGHT ON: TELEVISED DEBATES

We hear from our Head of Public Affairs Scotland, Jodie Hedley, on the impact of televised election debates.

Those from Scotland hoping to watch the launch of this year's Love Island on STV on Tuesday would have been surprised to see a very different lineup, in the form of the Scottish leaders' debate. It was an evening of mixed success - odds for the SNP winning in Scotland dropped in the hours following the debate while Scottish Labour saw a further boost.

On Tuesday, we saw Rishi and Keir go head-to-head in what some reports were describing as "the first debate of the general election campaign" (rubbing further salt in the wounds of our Scottish leaders). There's been plenty of analysis following the debates and by the time this reaches your inbox, I'm certain you'll be able to get all the key points from a hilarious TikTok, so I'll save you another roundup.

Instead, it got me thinking about the role of televised debates and their influence on voters. Are those tuning in ready to be persuaded or are they not for budging? Studies in 2015 and 2017 found these events did have some impact on voter decision-making, particularly influencing younger and first-time voters, as well as those who claimed they were not interested in politics. While the majority might have made up their minds, televised debates provide a unique chance (even in this world of mass media) for the public to compare political leaders side by side.

Although, that's not to say we're a happy audience. A YouGov **poll** following the Rishi/Keir debate reported most viewers found the debate a "frustrating experience" (62%). Viewing figures for Tuesday's debate were also **reportedly** down from the TV debate in 2019. With many more debates planned over the coming weeks, participants and broadcasters may have a tough job keeping the public engaged and tuning in.



WHAT WEBER'S UP TO THIS WEEK: PODCAST LAUNCH

We are launching our General Election podcast series today, published every Friday until polling day! Our Head of UK Public Affairs, Ella Fallows, is joined by the nation's top journalists, pundits and pollsters to discuss everything from parliamentary process to gaffes and gossip.

Episode #1 will feature **Sarah Southern**, former aide to Prime Minister David Cameron and regular

pundit on Sky News and the BBC, and **Joe Twyman**, one of today's most well-known pollsters. They bring perspectives from their different backgrounds to analyse the "week that was".

And... we're giving you the chance to ask our guests your burning political questions! Please reply to this email with your questions, and we'll put as many as we can directly to the experts.