



Makerfield wasn't the only by-election Reform UK just lost

Description

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Reform UK

In addition to losing in Makerfield, Reform UK lost the two seats it literally just won last month.

Reform losses, Tory gains

The 18 June by-elections in Essex took place because the Reform winner — you guessed it — turned out to be a racist mess. Stuart Prior had won both a County Council seat and a District Council seat in May. So both required new elections.

Even before [Reform snatched Essex from the Tories](#) there had already been reporting that [Prior had shown support for the rape of Sikh women and called white people "the master race"](#)

Along with vile Islamophobic social media posts, this was enough for Reform UK to expel him and force his [resignation soon after the election](#)

The Tories benefited from this scandal, and seemed to pick up votes from Reform:

Rayleigh West (Essex) Council By-Election Result:

- CON: 35.4% (+17.5)
- LDM: 29.5% (+2.9)
- RFM: 24.4% (-15.3)
- GRN: 5.3% (-0.8)
- Ind: 2.7% (New)

🌹 LAB: 2.0% (-1.9)
👤 Ind: 0.8% (New)

No Loc (-6.0) previous.

Conservative GAIN from Reform.
Changes w/ 2026.

â?? Election Maps UK (@ElectionMapsUK) [June 18, 2026](#)

In Rayleigh West [in May](#) Prior had gained more than twice as many votes as the Tories for the Essex County Council seat. The turnout had been 45%. But for the [18 June by-election](#) turnout had dropped to 32% and the Tories overturned Reformâ??s win.

The Liberal Democrats were the main challenger to the two far-right parties. And there was a strong hint that some tactical votes from both Green and Labour voters went their way.

In Sweyne Park & Grange [in May](#) while, it was a similar story. Prior again trounced the Tories in the Rochford District Council seat, with over twice as many votes as the Tories. Turnout fell from 46% to 37% in the [18 June by-election](#) though, and the Tories won.

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Not exactly good newsâ?!

Obviously, both Reform and the Tories are awful. But the Essex by-elections show that if thereâ??s division on the far right, Reform victories arenâ??t inevitable. It also shows that voter turnout has an impact.

It was a similar lesson in the higher-profile [Makerfield by-election](#). There was division on the far right. Therefore, with Andy Burnham offering the chance of getting rid of Keir Starmer ([if little else](#)), the anti-Reform tactical vote is clearly leaning his way. There was little division on the other side, and turnout [was pretty high at 58%](#)

Tactical votes drain hope, though. So while a strong anti-Reform vote is important, that must not let Labour and, in this case, Burnham, get away with [being awful](#)

Whatever Burnham may do in parliament or the Labour party, he will not stop the far right. Only greater democracy will. So the only reason anyone should be contemplating an anti-Reform deal with Burnham is if he actually commits to making our electoral system more democratic before the next election.

In the meantime, we can have a brief moment of celebration that thereâ??s a little less Reform in charge than there was a month ago.

Featured image via [Christopher Furlong / Getty Images](#)

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