AMEC
Asia Middle East Center
For Research & Dialogue

REPORT OF

AMEC'S ELECTION OBSERVATION MISSION

ON THE UNITED KINGDOM'S 2024 PARLIAMENTARY ELECTION

SUBMITTED TO

ELECTORAL COMMISSION OF THE UNITED KINGDOM

05 SEPTEMBER 2024

PREPARED BY

**DEMOCRACY & TRANSPARENCY INITIATIVE
ASIA MIDDLE EAST CENTER
FOR RESEARCH AND DIALOGUE (AMEC)**

I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The British parliamentary election held on July 4th, 2024, marked a significant turning point in the UK's political landscape. Utilizing the first-past-the-post (FPTP) system, voters selected candidates to represent their constituencies in Parliament. The Labour Party, led by Keir Starmer, achieved a landslide victory, securing 411 seats and ending 14 years of Conservative rule. The Conservatives, led by Rishi Sunak, experienced one of their worst electoral defeats, securing only 121 seats. The Liberal Democrats, Scottish National Party (SNP), and other smaller parties also saw notable changes in their representation. Key issues influencing voters included the economy, healthcare, immigration, Brexit, and international events, such as the conflict in Gaza. The election process was conducted smoothly with high standards of professionalism observed at polling stations. Despite a historically low turnout of 60%, the election was characterized by a relatively peaceful post-election environment.

MUAD ZAKI
Director, Democracy & Transparency Initiative

AHMED FARIH MOHAMED
Fellow, Democracy & Transparency Initiative

II. INTRODUCTION

Our organization, the Asia Middle East Center (AMEC), was accredited by the British Election Commission to observe the 2024 UK parliamentary elections. The observation mission, led by Muad Mohamad Zaki, Director of the Democracy & Transparency Initiative, spanned from July 2nd to July 8th, 2024. The mission aimed to assess the election process, voter engagement, and the post-election atmosphere. The scope of the mission included observing over 20 polling stations in London and conducting general discussions with voters to understand their perspectives on the electoral process and key issues. The team included Ahmed Farih, a fellow at AMEC, who served as a research analyst.

III. POLITICAL BACKGROUND

The 2024 election took place against a backdrop of significant political and economic instability. The Conservative Party, which had been in power for 14 years, faced widespread dissatisfaction due to its handling of the cost of living crisis and internal conflicts. The Labour Party, positioning itself as a centrist alternative, capitalized on the public's desire for change. Key issues that dominated the election included economic stability, healthcare, education reforms, immigration, Brexit, and the environment. The Israeli genocide in Gaza also unexpectedly influenced voter sentiments, with a significant number of voters shifting their support to independent or third-party candidates who campaigned on a pro-Palestine agenda.

Conservative Party and Brexit

Since the Conservative Party promoted Brexit, the UK has experienced significant political and economic upheaval. The referendum in 2016, led by then-Prime Minister David Cameron, resulted in a narrow victory for the Leave campaign. Cameron resigned, and Theresa May took over, attempting to navigate the complex process of withdrawing from the European Union. Her tenure was marked by repeated failures to secure a Brexit deal that could pass through Parliament, leading to her resignation in 2019.

Boris Johnson succeeded May, winning a decisive victory in the 2019 general election with a promise to "Get Brexit Done." However, his tenure saw mounting challenges, including the COVID-19 pandemic, which further complicated the Brexit process and strained the UK's economy. Johnson's leadership faced criticism for perceived disorganization and the economic impact of Brexit on businesses reliant on EU trade.

Rishi Sunak took over as Prime Minister after Johnson, focusing on stabilizing the economy post-Brexit. However, the Conservative Party continued to struggle with internal divisions and public dissatisfaction. The impact of Brexit had far-reaching effects, including increased bureaucracy for businesses trading with the EU, delays in goods transportation, and labor shortages in key industries such as agriculture and hospitality.

Economic and Social Impact of Brexit

Brexit led to numerous challenges for British businesses and individuals. Companies that depended on the EU market faced new tariffs, customs checks, and regulatory hurdles, making it more difficult and expensive to

export goods. Many small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) found the new trading environment particularly challenging, leading to decreased profitability and, in some cases, closures.

The financial sector, a cornerstone of the British economy, also felt the impact. Many financial firms relocated staff and operations to EU countries to maintain access to the European market. This exodus contributed to a loss of jobs and economic activity in the UK.

British passport holders traveling to Europe encountered new restrictions and complications. Freedom of movement ended, leading to longer wait times at borders and the need for additional documentation. British citizens now required visas or permits for extended stays in EU countries, complicating travel for work, study, or leisure.

Voter Sentiments

The cumulative effects of Brexit created significant voter dissatisfaction. Many who had initially supported Brexit in hopes of gaining greater national sovereignty and economic benefits felt disillusioned. The promised benefits of Brexit, such as increased funding for public services and enhanced global trade opportunities, did not materialize as expected. Instead, voters faced economic hardships, higher costs of living, and restricted travel freedoms.

For instance, farmers who relied on seasonal EU workers struggled with labor shortages, impacting their ability to harvest crops. Similarly, industries like manufacturing faced increased production costs due to delays and added expenses in importing raw materials from the EU. These issues contributed to a growing sense of frustration among voters who felt that Brexit had failed to deliver on its promises.

Political Climate Leading Up to the 2024 Election

The political climate before the 2024 election was tense, with the Conservative Party dealing with internal strife and public discontent. The cost of living crisis, exacerbated by global economic pressures and the lingering effects of Brexit, dominated public discourse. The Labour Party, under Keir Starmer's leadership, capitalized on this discontent by positioning themselves as a viable alternative, promising economic stability, healthcare improvements, and education reforms.

The Israeli genocide in Gaza also played a significant role in shaping voter sentiments. Many British citizens viewed their country's support for Israel as contrary to international law and humanitarian principles, leading to a shift towards candidates and parties advocating for a more balanced foreign policy.

In summary, the 2024 UK parliamentary election was influenced by a complex interplay of political, economic, and social factors. The Conservative Party's struggles with Brexit and its aftermath, combined with internal conflicts and public dissatisfaction, paved the way for Labour's significant victory. Voter sentiments were shaped by the tangible impacts of Brexit on their daily lives, the broader economic challenges, and emerging international issues, culminating in a desire for change and new leadership.

IV. IMPLEMENTATION OF PREVIOUS RECOMMENDATIONS

Since this was the first election observation mission to the UK by AMEC, there were no previous recommendations from our organization. However, it is noteworthy that the British Electoral Commission had implemented several reforms under the updated Elections Act. These reforms aimed to enhance the transparency and efficiency of the electoral process, contributing to a well-managed election.

V. LEGAL FRAMEWORK AND ELECTORAL SYSTEM

The UK employs the first-past-the-post (FPTP) system, where the candidate with the most votes in each constituency becomes an MP. This system often results in disproportionate representation, benefiting larger parties like Labour and the Conservatives. The legal framework for elections is robust, with comprehensive regulations ensuring a transparent and fair process. Under this system, a party can secure a majority of seats without obtaining a majority of the overall vote, as was the case in this election where Labour secured 411 seats with only 34% of the vote.

VI. ELECTORAL ADMINISTRATION

The Electoral Commission effectively managed the election process, ensuring professional and efficient operations. Key preparations included extensive voter education campaigns, updates to the voter registration system, and training for election staff. The Commission's efforts in managing the logistics and ensuring the integrity of the election were commendable. The deployment of technology for voter registration and verification contributed to the smooth conduct of the election.

VII. VOTER REGISTRATION

The voter registration process was inclusive and transparent. British citizens, including eligible Irish citizens and citizens of Crown Dependencies, could register online. The process was streamlined to accommodate changes in address, name, or nationality without requiring re-registration for each election. The registration system was designed to be user-friendly, allowing for easy access and minimal bureaucratic hurdles. Efforts to include overseas voters were also notable, ensuring that British citizens living abroad could participate in the election.

VIII. POLITICAL PARTY AND CANDIDATE REGISTRATION

The registration process for political parties and candidates was smooth, with no significant challenges reported. The election saw an increase in the number of women candidates, reflecting a positive trend towards gender inclusivity in politics. This increase is indicative of a broader movement towards equal representation in the UK's political landscape. The Electoral Commission facilitated the registration process by providing clear guidelines and support to candidates and parties.

IX. CAMPAIGN ENVIRONMENT

The campaign environment for the 2024 UK parliamentary election was marked by intense polarization and heightened tensions. Candidates from various parties reported incidents of harassment and threats, reflecting the deep divisions within the electorate. The rise of far-right parties like Reform UK and the lingering divisions from Brexit contributed significantly to the charged atmosphere.

Far-Right Parties and Media Influence

Reform UK, a far-right party, gained considerable traction during the campaign. Mainstream media and radio stations provided them with substantial airtime, which enabled them to reach a broader audience. This media exposure was pivotal in boosting their visibility and influence. Reform UK capitalized on nationalist sentiments and dissatisfaction with the Conservative government's handling of immigration and economic issues.

Labour Party's Campaign Strategy

The Labour Party, led by Keir Starmer, strategically repositioned itself as a centrist alternative to appeal to a wider voter base. Moving away from its traditional left-wing policies, Labour focused on economic stability, healthcare improvements, and education reforms. This shift aimed to attract moderate voters who were disillusioned with the Conservatives but wary of more radical policies. Labour's campaign emphasized unity, competence, and the need for change after 14 years of Conservative rule.

Conservative Party's Campaign Strategy

The Conservative Party, under Rishi Sunak's leadership, campaigned on their experience and economic achievements. They highlighted their management of the 2.3% inflation rate and efforts to stabilize the economy post-Brexit. Despite these efforts, the Conservatives struggled to overcome widespread public dissatisfaction with their handling of the cost of living crisis and internal party conflicts. Their campaign faced significant challenges from both Labour and the rising influence of Reform UK.

Smaller Parties and Independent Candidates

Smaller parties such as the Liberal Democrats, Scottish National Party (SNP), and the Green Party also played significant roles in the campaign:

- **Liberal Democrats**: Positioned themselves as the best third-party choice for voters dissatisfied with both Labour and the Conservatives. They focused on social justice, environmental issues, and increasing funding for public services.

- **Scottish National Party (SNP)**: Campaigned on representing Scottish interests in the UK Parliament and advocating for Scottish independence. They aimed to secure as many seats as possible in Scotland to strengthen their influence.

- **Green Party**: Aimed to secure a few seats to amplify their voice on environmental issues and sustainable development in Parliament.

Increase in Independent and Third-Party Candidates

The 2024 election saw a noticeable increase in independent and new third-party candidates. These candidates often attracted votes from the larger parties, potentially diminishing their margin of majority. For instance, in Ilford North constituency, independent candidate and new comer Leanne Mohamad received 15,119 votes, just 527 votes shy of a win against Labour's candidate Wes Streeting. In other constituencies the margin where Labour won this time to previous 2019 election has declined drastically, showing a risk for Labour in future elections, if they are unable to implement their election promises.

Voter Shifts and Impact on Major Parties

The presence of independent and third-party candidates created a more fragmented vote distribution, affecting the major parties' ability to secure large majorities. Many voters, disillusioned with the established parties, sought alternatives that better represented their views on key issues such as immigration, the environment, and international affairs. This shift in voter allegiance highlighted the electorate's growing desire for diverse representation and more focused issue-based politics.

In summary, the 2024 UK parliamentary election campaign was characterized by a highly polarized environment, significant media influence, strategic repositioning by major parties, and the rise of independent and third-party candidates. These dynamics contributed to a complex and multifaceted election landscape, reflecting the evolving political sentiments of the British electorate.

X. CAMPAIGN FINANCE

Campaign finance was regulated by the Electoral Commission, with strict spending limits for parties and candidates. The regulated period for party spending began on July 6, 2023, and included various expenses such as political broadcasts and leaflets. Individual candidates had separate spending limits for the long and short campaign periods. The transparency of campaign finance reporting was maintained, with all parties adhering to the established guidelines. Third-party campaigns, including those by charities and trade unions, were also subject to spending limits, ensuring a level playing field.

XI. MEDIA

Media coverage of the election was comprehensive, with TV, radio, and online platforms providing extensive coverage. Social media played a crucial role, especially among younger voters. Traditional media sources, including newspapers and TV channels, remained the primary information sources for voters above 24 years old. The role of social media in shaping voter perceptions was significant, with platforms like YouTube, Instagram, X (formerly Twitter), TikTok, and Snapchat being widely used for political messaging. The mainstream media's focus on certain parties and candidates influenced public opinion and voter behavior.

XII. SOCIAL MEDIA AND DIGITAL RIGHTS

Social media emerged as a significant tool for campaigning in the 2024 UK parliamentary election, particularly among voters under 24. Platforms like YouTube, Instagram, X (formerly Twitter), TikTok, and Snapchat were widely used for political messaging. These platforms allowed parties and candidates to reach a broader audience, engage with younger voters, and disseminate their campaign messages effectively.

Role of Social Media in Campaigning

Social media provided a crucial opportunity for smaller parties and independent candidates to compete against more well-established parties. In the absence of regulation requiring proportional airtime for all candidates, traditional media often favored major parties, making it challenging for smaller and newer political entities to gain visibility. Social media leveled the playing field, allowing these candidates to:

- **Directly Engage with Voters**: Social media platforms enabled candidates to interact with voters directly, answer their questions, and address their concerns in real-time. This direct engagement fostered a sense of connection and trust between candidates and their potential supporters.

- **Share Campaign Content**: Candidates could share a variety of content, including videos, infographics, live streams, and written posts, to convey their messages and campaign promises. This multimedia approach helped in reaching diverse voter demographics.

- **Mobilize Support**: Social media was instrumental in organizing campaign events, rallies, and volunteer activities. It facilitated the mobilization of supporters and the coordination of grassroots efforts.

Influence of Social Media on Election Dynamics

The influence of social media extended beyond just campaigning. It played a critical role in shaping public opinion and the overall election dynamics:

- **Amplifying Voices**: Social media gave a platform to minority voices and independent candidates who might not have received coverage in traditional media. This inclusivity supported a more democratic election process by ensuring a diversity of viewpoints.

- **Information Dissemination**: Social media was a key source of information for many voters. While TV remained the primary source for voters above 24, younger voters predominantly relied on social media for news and updates. This shift underscored the growing importance of digital platforms in modern elections.

- **Misinformation and Digital Rights**: Despite its benefits, the use of social media also raised concerns about misinformation and the influence of foreign entities. The spread of false information could mislead voters and impact their decisions. The Electoral Commission monitored social media activities to ensure compliance with campaign regulations and to address instances of misinformation. Efforts were made to uphold digital rights and maintain the integrity of the election process.

Case Studies and Examples

1. **Independent Candidates**: Independent candidates like former Labour MP Jeremy Corbyn used social media extensively to campaign on specific issues such as support for Palestine. Platforms like YouTube and Instagram allowed them to reach audiences who were passionate about these issues, garnering support that might have been difficult to achieve through traditional media.

2. **Smaller Parties**: The Green Party and Reform UK leveraged social media to amplify their messages on environmental issues and nationalist policies, respectively. Through targeted campaigns on platforms like TikTok and X, they engaged with voters who were looking for alternatives to the major parties.

3. **Youth Engagement**: Social media campaigns by all parties included initiatives specifically designed to engage young voters. This demographic, which primarily consumed content on platforms like TikTok and Snapchat, responded well to creative and interactive campaign strategies.

In conclusion, social media played a critical role in the 2024 UK parliamentary election by providing a platform for smaller parties and independent candidates to compete to some extent against established parties that had access to mainstream TV outlets. It facilitated direct voter engagement, amplified diverse voices, and helped maintain a more democratic election process.

XIII. PARTICIPATION OF WOMEN

The participation of women in the 2024 UK parliamentary election saw a noticeable increase, reflecting ongoing efforts to promote gender equality in politics. According to data from the Electoral Commission, the number of female candidates rose to 1,140 out of a total of 3,300 candidates, representing approximately 34.5%. This is an improvement from the 2019 general election, where 1,124 women stood as candidates, making up around 33% of the total.

Statistics and Trends

- **Female Candidates**: In the 2024 election, 1,140 women stood as candidates, an increase from 1,124 in 2019. This represents a 1.5 percentage point increase in female representation among candidates.

- **Elected Women MPs**: The number of women elected to Parliament also saw an increase. In 2019, 220 women were elected, accounting for 34% of the House of Commons. In 2024, this number increased to 230, representing 35.4% of all MPs.

- **Party Initiatives**: Major political parties made concerted efforts to increase the number of women candidates. For example, the Labour Party implemented all-women shortlists in certain constituencies to ensure female representation. The Conservative Party also committed to selecting more female candidates through their Women2Win initiative.

Efforts and Impact

The increased representation of women candidates is the result of sustained efforts by political parties and advocacy groups to promote gender inclusivity. These efforts include:

- **All-Women Shortlists**: The Labour Party's policy of implementing all-women shortlists in specific constituencies has been a significant factor in increasing female representation.

- **Mentorship and Support Programs**: Initiatives like the Conservative Party's Women2Win program provide mentorship and support to prospective female candidates, helping them navigate the political landscape and succeed in elections.

- **Public Awareness Campaigns**: Advocacy groups and non-governmental organizations have conducted public awareness campaigns to highlight the importance of gender equality in politics and encourage women to run for office.

Future Outlook

The positive trend of increasing female participation in UK politics is expected to continue, contributing to greater gender inclusivity and a more balanced and representative Parliament. The commitment of political parties to gender equality, combined with the growing public support for diverse representation, suggests that future elections will see even higher numbers of women candidates and elected officials.

XV. PARTICIPATION OF YOUTH

Even though the number of voters were not as high as expected, youth engagement in the 2024 UK parliamentary election was particularly notable, with a substantial number of young voters turning out to participate. Social media played a critical role in engaging young voters. Platforms such as YouTube, Instagram, X (formerly Twitter), TikTok, and Snapchat were extensively used to disseminate political messages and mobilize this demographic.

Statistics and Trends

- **Youth Turnout**: Voter turnout among the 18-24 age group was 47%, an increase from 40% in the 2019 general election. This surge reflects the success of various engagement strategies aimed at mobilizing young voters.

- **Voting Preferences**: Labour was the predominant choice among young voters, securing 41% of the 18-24 age group's vote and 45% of the 25-29 age group. The Green Party also attracted substantial support from young voters, with 16% of the 18-24 age group favoring their policies.

Key Issues for Young Voters

Young voters were particularly concerned with issues that directly affected their future, including:

- **Climate Change**: Environmental policies were a major priority for young voters, influencing their support for parties like the Green Party and Labour, which emphasized sustainability and climate action.

- **Education and Employment**: Policies addressing student loans, education funding, and job opportunities were crucial in shaping the voting preferences of young people. Parties that promised reforms and support in these areas garnered significant support from the youth demographic.

- **Social Justice**: Issues such as racial equality, gender rights, and support for marginalized communities were pivotal for young voters. Parties that advocated for social justice and inclusivity resonated strongly with this group.

XVI. CITIZEN AND INTERNATIONAL ELECTION OBSERVATION

AMEC's observation mission included a team that concentrated efforts in London, covering over 20 polling stations on election day. The mission gathered valuable insights into voter feedback and the overall election process. The observation team noted the professionalism and efficiency of the election staff, as well as the transparency of the voting and counting processes.

XVII. ELECTORAL DISPUTES

Electoral disputes were handled efficiently, with no significant complaints or legal challenges reported. The dispute resolution mechanisms in place were effective in addressing minor issues that arose. The Electoral Commission provided clear guidelines for filing complaints and ensured that all disputes were resolved in a timely and transparent manner.

XVIII. POLLING, COUNTING, AND TABULATION OF RESULTS

Polling day operations were conducted smoothly, with high standards observed in opening, voting, and counting procedures. The transparency and efficiency of the counting process were commendable, contributing to the credibility of the election results. Observers noted the orderly conduct at polling stations and the prompt handling of any issues by election staff.

XIX. RESULTS AND POST-ELECTION ENVIRONMENT

The final results of the 2024 UK parliamentary election saw the Labour Party securing 411 seats, followed by the Conservatives with 121 seats, and the Liberal Democrats with 72 seats. The post-election environment remained calm, with a smooth transition of power and no significant unrest. The public and political parties accepted the results, and the new government, led by Prime Minister Keir Starmer, began its term with a strong mandate.

XX. RECOMMENDATIONS

For Future Elections:

1. **Enhance Youth Engagement**: Continue to leverage social media and youth-specific initiatives to maintain high levels of youth participation. Educate them on the first-past-the-post (FPTP) electoral system so that they understand just how to be active in politics without feeling like it will never allow their voices to be heard. There is a clear lack of understanding amongst the youth on this.

2. **Address Campaign Harassment**: Implement measures to protect candidates from harassment and threats during the campaign period. Some measures is to educate the general public on what are the basic lines that should not be crossed in different interactions with candidates.

3. **Promote Inclusivity**: Encourage the participation of women and minority groups in the political process. Reach out to local community centres and educate them on the democratic election process better in order for them to see it as an opportunity to have their voices heard. At the same time, maybe have joint sessions with minority community leaders to help them ask questions and understand that in a democracy it is about diverse communities understanding their differences and compromising on some issues, while joining together in common issues for a greater good.

For Stakeholders:

1. **Transparency in Campaign Finance**: Maintain stringent regulations on campaign finance to ensure transparency and fairness. This is currently the top danger for constituencies and one of the main factors that might decrease the level of voter participation. It is important for the election commission to take extra steps to make sure no foreign interest, be it governments or corporations are allowed to directly or indirectly fund political parties or candidates. British voters need to feel that great and unique importance of their one individual one vote. They should be given confidence to know only their vote decides the future of their country.

2. **Media Responsibility**: Encourage balanced and impartial coverage by traditional and social media platforms. There was an increased efforts to influence certain social media platforms to decrease the level of visibility on certain current event topics which might influence voters to change their vote away from the government. The Election Commission can promote social media companies to give an open space for its users to practice freedom of expression without any restrictions, especially during campaign time.

3. **Digital Rights Protection**: Strengthen measures to combat misinformation and foreign interference in digital campaigns. One of the best examples is the Community Note feature by the social media platform X (formerly Twitter), where governments, NGOs and corporations do not have an opportunity to censor free speech.

ANNEXES

Annex 1 – Election Results:

- **General election 2024 results,**

   https://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/CBP-10009/CBP-10009.pdf

- **A low participation election,**

   https://www.youngfoundation.org/insights/features/a-low-participation-election/

Annex 2 – Media Monitoring Reports:

- **Overview and key findings of the 2024 Digital News Report,**
   https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/digital-news-report/2024/dnr-executive-summary

Annex 3 – Social Media Monitoring Analysis:

- **YouGov: How are Britons getting news during the 2024 general election,**

   https://ygo-assets-websites-editorial-emea.yougov.net/documents/Internal_GENewsConsumption_240624_VI.pdf