

# What Happens When Reform Cannot Deliver Either?

Adam Tugwell | 8 May 2026



It's the day after the local elections, and the results coming in from across the country suggest a seismic shift in British politics - one that could shape the next Westminster government in ways we have not yet fully grasped.

Yet we talk as if both the causes and the consequences of this shift are already understood. People speak with a confidence that suggests the answers are obvious. But the questions that actually matter - why this is happening, how far it goes, what it really means, and where it stops - are barely being touched. And when you actually look inside

the political “can” we’ve opened, the reality is nothing like the branding most people think they recognise.

A big part of the problem is that many do not really understand the political choices in front of us. The problems seem easy to understand; the solutions appear logical and the answer for many really does to come in the shape of Reform UK.

On the face of it, Reform have come from nowhere. But they have not appeared out of thin air. Reform grew out of the Brexit Party, which grew out of UKIP, which itself followed earlier formations such as the Anti-Federalist League.

What looks new is, in part, simply the latest evolution of something that has been developing for decades. They have a charismatic leader who seems to connect effortlessly with the disenfranchised and the angry. Their polling, media presence and narrative momentum all suggest that voting Reform is becoming, for many, the clearest available expression of a desire for change.

But that is all it is: an expression of desire. And once you widen the lens, the picture becomes clearer.

Commentators discussing today’s results talk as if Reform are achieving something UKIP never managed. But pre-referendum UKIP was an openly single-issue party and did not pretend otherwise. Reform is different in form, but not in kind. It is the next evolution: playing the same game as everyone else in politics, talking up this and that, while the reality would look very different if and when the responsibility of government ever became theirs.

However, the problems the UK faces can no longer be solved by the political system we have, because the issues are now systemic - rooted in the way power, money, institutions and incentives are arranged - and our political system is itself part of the problem.

Once you accept that, you can begin to see that we have passed the point where *any* government can do anything meaningful without confronting the entire structure head-on.

Anything else is just throwing stones at symptoms while claiming to treat the cause.

### **The way we think about politics mirrors the way our politicians think about the world.**

That shared mindset blinds us to the mechanics of a system that continues to function only because key parts of it remain hidden: *where power really sits, how responsibility is displaced, and how failure is managed politically rather than resolved.*

Even politicians with the best motives cannot act against a structure that survives under the mantra: “this is just the way it is”.

This is why the questions around Reform's candidate selection, their approach to local governance, and what happens when they take control of councils matter - but not in the way people assume.

The collapse of local government is already baked into the system through financial strain, hollowed-out capacity and deep dependence on central government, regardless of who runs it. Yet this is obscured by the familiar narrative that Westminster is where everything happens, leaving local government to look irrelevant even as it quietly fails.

And that brings us to the national picture. Local government is not separate from Westminster so much as an early warning of the same underlying limits. It is only *if and when* Reform hold power nationally that we will truly see what they can - and, more importantly, cannot - do.

No matter the talk about "the blob", out-of-control civil servants or schemes like DOGE, the penny will drop quickly. The promises, whether plausible or not, will collide with the same structural limits that constrained Labour before them and the Conservatives before that: *institutional inertia, fiscal pressure, market dependence, and a state far less free-moving than political rhetoric suggests.*

**They cannot use the power entrusted to them unless they are prepared to challenge the entire system - and nothing suggests they are.**

In reality, Reform's expanding establishment credentials and growing comfort within the system are already visible at almost every turn: in the broadening of their appeal, in the professionalisation of their pitch, and in the familiar gap between political language and political reality. And if the system has not already collapsed - through the actions of this government, through global events linked to conflict, or through something like market failure - by the time they reach government - *if indeed they can*, Reform will simply become the next set of public figureheads seen to be in control, right up until collapse arrives from whichever direction it eventually comes.

This is the real tragedy. The journey of misplaced hope that so many are now on is not inevitable. With the support Reform clearly have, they *could* be agents of genuine change - *if* they were willing to live up to the responsibility they seek and turn their rhetoric about putting the country first into something arguably more than lip service.

But none of the parties are offering anything fundamentally different. They are all offering variations of the same approach, shaped by the same assumptions, constrained by the same machinery.

Until we have a political movement that isn't trying to "do politics" in the way we currently understand it, our direction remains set. The problems will continue to deepen, and sooner or later they will spiral beyond control.

When that moment comes, we will be left at the mercy of whoever can shout loudest - and facing a future far darker than anything most people currently imagine when they hear the name Reform.

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