

ARE WE NOW BEYOND POLITICS?

AGEING, FISCAL LOCK-IN AND THE LIMITS OF ORDINARY
PEACETIME GOVERNANCE

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SUMMARY

THIS ESSAY ASKS a narrow question with broad implications: Does the post-war record contain a peacetime example of Britain reversing the kind of economic and fiscal trajectory now experienced by the UK? The answer matters because the country is not facing a single problem. It is facing a stack of burdens: low GDP per capita, low productivity, demographic and health pressures, fiscal lock-in, and failing public services.

The claim is not that politicians are powerless. Governments can still tax, spend, regulate, redistribute burdens and change institutions. Elections still matter. Budgets still matter. The harder claim is that the present combination of pressures may require a scale of institutional reform and policy execution that the ordinary peacetime British government has not managed since 1945.

The current baseline is already tight. Real GDP rose in 2025, but GDP per head fell in both Q3 and Q4. Output per hour was lower than a year earlier on the main ONS measure. The old-age dependency ratio is projected to rise from 278 in mid-2022 to 302 by mid-2047, at the same time, health-related inactivity depletes the tax contributor base within working age. The fiscal structure is also heavily pre-committed: in the OBR's March 2026 forecast, total managed expenditure remains around 44% of GDP by 2030-31, with annually managed expenditure larger than departmental expenditure limits.

The historical test is deliberately strict. A true counterexample would need to show durable improvement in GDP per head relative to peers, stronger productivity, an improved or stable contributor position, and either lower fiscal lock-in or enough growth to absorb it. Major British adjustments did occur after 1945, but they were commonly enabled by crisis, external discipline, institutional regime change or exceptional windfall conditions. The strongest partial challenge is the post-1992 and post-1997 credibility regime, but even that does not clearly solve today's combined problem of weak productivity, ageing, working-age ill-health and fiscal lock-in.

The conclusion is therefore sobering. Britain can still change direction. What the post-war record does not show is a peacetime precedent for reversing the problems within one or two parliaments. If the trajectory does not change, the outcome will be financial collapse or a transition from a politics of renewal to a politics of constraint management.

AT A GLANCE

- Core judgement: there is no clean post-war ordinary-peacetime example of Britain reversing the combined growth, productivity, contributor-base and fiscal pressures now in view.
- Why ageing matters: the issue is not only more older people. It is a weaker effective contributor base meeting a larger claimant state.
- Strongest challenge: the post-1992 and post-1997 credibility regime is a serious partial counterexample, but not a clean solution to today's combined burden stack.
- Practical implication: if the trajectory is not changed, the outcome is somewhere between unpleasant and disastrous.

FROM UNGOVERNABILITY TO A TESTABLE CLAIM

Britain increasingly feels harder to govern. That feeling is now common across very different political camps, but it is usually expressed too vaguely to test. 'Ungovernable' can mean ministerial weakness, party fragmentation, bureaucratic inertia, public distrust, fiscal exhaustion, or simply disappointment after repeated promises of renewal. This essay uses the term more narrowly. It asks whether Britain has reached a point at which reversing its economic trajectory through ordinary peacetime governance would require more institutional reform and policy execution than the post-war record clearly demonstrates.

That is not the same as saying public policy no longer matters. The question is not whether governments can act. They plainly can. The question is whether normal-cycle politics can still generate the scale of improvement now required in living standards, productivity, contributor strength and fiscal room.

The essay therefore treats governability as an economic and fiscal problem before it treats it as a rhetorical or moral one. A country has governing space when its economy produces enough growth in living standards, enough productivity improvement and enough effective contributors to absorb the claims placed on the state. That space narrows when living standards stall, productivity weakens, the contributor base comes under strain and a growing share of public spending is already spoken for.

This is why headline GDP is not the right scorecard. In the current UK context, it is too flattering. A country can record positive aggregate growth while ordinary living standards weaken if population growth absorbs the gain. GDP per head therefore sits at the centre of the analysis.

THE BURDEN STACK

The present British baseline is weak in exactly the places that matter for governing capacity. The first weakness is living standards. ONS estimates show that real GDP rose by 1.3% in 2025, but real GDP per head fell by 0.1% in both Q3 and Q4. The average person, therefore, ended the year in a worse position than the headline growth figure suggests.

The second weakness is productivity. ONS's Q4 2025 productivity release showed output per hour worked 0.5% lower than a year earlier on the main Labour Force Survey-based measure. ONS also published an experimental administrative-data measure that moved in the opposite direction, and it cautions against over-reading short-run differences between the two series. That caveat matters. Even with it, the official picture does not show a convincing rebound in productivity.

Productivity matters because it is the cleanest non-inflationary route to higher wages, higher tax receipts and greater fiscal capacity. Without it, governments are left relying on increased labour input, higher taxes, greater borrowing, or reducing spending.

The third weakness is the contributor base. ONS projects the old-age dependency ratio rising from 278 in mid-2022 to 289 in mid-2032 and 302 by mid-2047. The working-age population is still projected to rise, but the pensionable-age population rises faster. The problem is not a simple collapse in working-age numbers. It is a worsening balance between those more likely to finance the state and those more likely to draw heavily on pensions, health and care.

That age-based picture understates the problem because it overlooks health-related

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detachment among the working-age population. The Keep Britain Working review describes a quiet but urgent crisis in which over one in five working-age adults are out of the workforce substantially because of health problems. ONS data also show long-term sickness inactivity above 2.5 million in 2023 and a continuing risk of 16- 24-year-olds not being in education, employment or training (NEETs).

The fourth weakness is fiscal lock-in. According to the OBR's March 2026 forecast, total managed expenditure remains relatively stable—rising from 44.0% of GDP in 2024-25 to 44.3% in 2030-31—but the composition reveals the constraint. Departmental expenditure limits constitute 20.7% of GDP in 2030-31, whilst annually managed expenditure accounts for 23.6%. The Commons Library observes that Spending Reviews cover only approximately 40% of total public spending, meaning ministers enter each parliament with direct control over less than half the state's budget.

The fifth weakness is state conversion. A high-spending state is not necessarily hard to govern if it turns rising inputs into rising output. It becomes much harder to steer when that conversion weakens. ONS estimates that total public service productivity in 2024 remained 3.4% below 2019, while healthcare productivity was 7.9% below. In short, every pound of money spent in the public sector delivers less than it did pre-COVID.

Those five pressures together form the burden stack. The importance of the stack lies in the interaction. Weak productivity limits revenues. Weak GDP per head reduces political tolerance for higher taxation. Ageing and ill-health increase demand-led claims. Fiscal lock-in narrows the room for choice. Declining efficiency of the state means that more money is needed merely to maintain existing functions. The argument of this essay depends less on any one figure than on the fact that the pressures are now reinforcing one another.

WHAT 'GOVERNING CAPACITY' MEANS IN ECONOMIC TERMS

For the purposes of this essay, governing capacity is not measured by the number of announcements, the size of a majority, or the speed with which ministers can change rules. It is measured by whether a government can materially improve the conditions that determine economic room for manoeuvre.

Six factors matter: living standards, productive capacity, effective contributors, fiscal lock-in, fiscal discretion and state efficiency. Living standards are anchored in real GDP per head. Productive capacity is anchored in output per hour and business investment. Effective contributors are not simply people of working age, but people who are actually working or available to work. Fiscal lock-in refers to spending categories that are difficult to compress because they are demand-led, entitlement-based, or debt-service-driven. Fiscal discretion distinguishes the parts of the budget that governments can plan from those that move with demand, such as uprating rules and interest rates. State efficiency measures how effectively the public sector turns inputs into outputs.

This model avoids two errors. The first is to treat Britain as though a single growth number captures the problem. It does not. The second is to treat fiscal strain as though it were only a matter of political will. It is also a matter of demographic structure, health, productivity and the design of public spending.

A government may be politically strong, as theoretically is the current Labour administration, but economically constrained. It may pass legislation and still fail to alter the trajectory.

It may raise taxes and still lose room if productivity doesn't increase, health-related inactivity rises or debt interest absorbs more of the fiscal margin. Governing capacity, in this sense, is not the ability to make choices. It is the ability to make choices that improve the underlying room for choice later.

AGEING, HEALTH AND FUNCTIONAL DEPENDENCY

Population ageing belongs at the centre of the essay, but not in its simplest form. ONS projects the UK working-age population rising from 43.2 million in mid-2022 to 49.9 million in mid-2047, while the number of people of pensionable age rises faster, reaching 15.1 million. Over the same period, the old-age dependency ratio rises from 278 to 302.

This does not mean that Britain is running out of working-age people. It means that the balance between likely contributors and likely claimants is moving in the wrong direction. ONS has itself argued that age-only dependency ratios are becoming less useful as more people work up to and beyond State Pension age, and it has proposed the Active Dependency Ratio as a broader measure because it compares the economically inactive population with the economically active population.

That broader dependency problem is visible in health data. Long-term sickness inactivity rose above 2.5 million in 2023, while the Keep Britain Working review describes health-related detachment from work as a central national problem. The point is not only that more older people will draw on pensions, health and care. It is that the effective contributor base within the working age is shrinking.

The result is functional dependency. Ageing raises the number of older claimants relative to workers. Ill-health weakens the pool of contributors inside working age. Rising mental illness amongst the young reduces their likelihood of being contributors of taxes. A society can therefore face rising fiscal strain even while the raw number of working-age people continues to increase.

FISCAL LOCK-IN AND THE LIMITS OF BUDGETARY CHOICE

The fiscal side of the argument begins with a simple distinction: total public spending is not the same as politically controllable public spending. The Office for Budget Responsibility's March 2026 forecast has total managed expenditure broadly stable around 44% of GDP across the medium-term forecast. But the state is not a single discretionary pot. Departmental Expenditure Limits spending is planned in Spending Reviews; Annually Managed Expenditure spending is more demand-led and less directly controllable from year to year.

The least discretionary parts of the state are also the parts under persistent pressure. The OBR forecasts total welfare spending rising from £314.8 billion in 2024-25 to £406.9 billion in 2030-31. Within that, pensioner spending rises from £151.0 billion to £196.2 billion, and disability benefits from £41.4 billion to £65.5 billion. Incapacity and disability caseloads also rise over the forecast.

The long-run picture is sharper. On unchanged-policy assumptions, OBR projections show health spending rising from 7.6% to 14.5% of GDP by 2073-74, state pensions from 5.2% to 7.9%, and adult social care from 1.5% to 2.4%. These are not normal departmental pres-

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asures that can be trimmed easily in a Spending Review. They are structural claims driven by age, health and social expectation.

The fiscal arithmetic is already tight. The OBR forecasts National Accounts taxes rising to 38.5% of GDP by 2030-31, a historical high. UK debt interest payments are currently at their highest peacetime level on record. The Office for Budget Responsibility projects that debt interest will cost £111 billion in 2025-26, representing 8.3% of all government spending and 3.7% of GDP

Small movements in growth, effective tax rates, or gilt yields can shift borrowing by substantial amounts. This does not demonstrate that Britain is fatally trapped, but it does reveal that a state with high fiscal lock-in becomes increasingly vulnerable to growth short-falls, tax-base erosion, and rising financing costs

THE HISTORICAL TEST

The historical question is deliberately narrow. It is not whether governments have ever made large decisions. It is not whether they have ever changed institutions profoundly. It is whether an ordinary peacetime government or governing settlement has shown, within roughly one or two parliaments, a durable ability to improve living standards, productivity, net numbers contributing tax and fiscal room at the same time.

An episode counts as a true counterexample only if it clears all four hurdles.

The essay also applies an enabling-condition filter. War legacy, IMF intervention, exchange-rate collapse, market panic and major windfalls are not treated as clean proof of ordinary political capacity. Such episodes still matter, but they show the circumstances in which Britain has historically changed direction once normal constraints had already broken down

This strictness is necessary because British political history is full of episodes that look decisive in retrospect. The question is not whether they were important. It is whether they demonstrate the kind of ordinary peacetime adjustment now required.

THE MAIN CONTEST CASES

The clearest negative cases are 1967 and the broader 1976 crisis. These were not examples of ordinary peacetime governments steadily solving a structural adjustment problem. They were sterling and external-financing crises. The IFS treats the devaluation of 1967, the 1976 IMF crisis and the 1992 ERM crisis as part of the classic sterling-crisis sequence.

The 1979 case is more complicated. It is often treated as proof that governments can reshape the British economy dramatically in peacetime. In political terms, that is true. In economic terms, it is less clean. OBR evidence shows that North Sea receipts rose rapidly between 1975-76 and 1984-85, reaching 3.1% of GDP, while lower defence spending created additional room over the same broad period. Those conditions do not invalidate the 1980s as an episode of political restructuring, but they do weaken it as a precedent for today. Especially at a time when the government's policy is to reduce the contribution from North Sea oil and increase defence spending.

The strongest historical challenge comes from the post-1992 and post-1997 period. The Bank of England's own historical account describes the post-1992 inflation-targeting frame-

work as producing an exceptionally stable macroeconomic environment on one important gauge, and operational independence over monetary policy was granted on 6 May 1997. On the essay's scoring exercise, this period performs much better than the other contest cases.

Even here, however, the challenge is partial. The period shows that Britain can improve macroeconomic credibility and growth performance under peacetime institutional reform. It does not clearly demonstrate an ordinary-peacetime solution to today's combined problem of weak productivity, rising age-related claims, working-age ill-health and spending lock-in.

The 2010 case cuts in the other direction. The discretionary fiscal tightening after 2010 was large enough to test whether determined political action could reset the broader trend. It changed burdens. It did not clearly restore durable living standards, productivity strength or fiscal room. Brexit then became a further structural break, with the Bank of England and OBR material both identifying uncertainty effects on investment and productivity.

Episode	Main enabling condition	What it shows	Verdict
1967 / 1976	Sterling and external-financing crisis	Fast adjustment under pressure, not ordinary peacetime politics	Not a counterexample
1979	Political restructuring with major fiscal offsets	Large political change, but windfall-assisted and not a clean precedent	Mixed
1992	ERM exit and regime break	Strong partial success on credibility and growth, but crisis-led	Partial exception
1997	Credibility consolidation and Bank independence	Strongest ordinary-peacetime challenge in the post-war record	Serious partial challenge
2010	Large discretionary fiscal tightening	Shows governments can act hard without clearly resetting the trend	No full reset

CRISIS, WINDFALL OR ORDINARY POLITICS?

The historical pattern is not random. Large British adjustments tend to appear under one of four enabling conditions: war legacy, external discipline, regime or credibility reset, and windfall or offsetting fiscal space.

The 2022 gilt episode shows the modern boundary case. The Bank of England acted quickly and decisively to restore orderly market conditions in long-dated gilts. But it did so because financial stability concerns had become acute. That is evidence that the British state can still act under binding constraint. There is no evidence that normal-cycle politics can routinely engineer an equivalent real-economy reset.

This distinction sharpens the central claim. Britain can change direction. The more important question is what has historically enabled that change. If the answer is repeatedly crisis, external pressure, credibility reset, or windfall, then the case that ordinary peacetime politics alone can now generate a larger and more complex adjustment weakens.

WHY THE PRESENT MAY BE HARDER

The situation in 2-026 may be harder because the adjustment challenge is more layered. Ageing is advancing, but so is health-related inactivity inside working age. Fiscal offsets that helped earlier adjustments are weaker, exhausted or reversing. The tax burden is already

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high by post-war standards, and interest on debt remains a greater constraint than it was during the low-rate period.

There may also be a psychological dimension. Stagnation does not only weaken output, productivity and fiscal room. It can alter expectations. A society that has experienced repeated disappointment may become more defensive, more risk-averse and more inclined to protect existing arrangements against disruption. New building, new investment and institutional reform then face not only fiscal and administrative barriers but a wider culture of caution.

The danger is a self-reinforcing cycle. Weak growth lowers aspirations. Lower aspirations make growth-restoring change harder to implement. Political promises then become larger because the need for renewal is obvious, but delivery becomes harder because the machinery, incentives and fiscal room are weaker than the promises assume.

The state also enters this period without a convincing productivity rebound of its own. Public-service productivity remains below 2019, with trust in the public institutions at an all-time low. A state with rising claims and weak internal conversion starts from a worse position than one with rising claims but improving efficiency.

COUNTERARGUMENTS, LIMITS AND FALSIFIERS

The strongest counterargument is not that the problem is illusory. It is that policy retains the capacity to make a difference through the right instruments. The IMF's 2024 Article IV consultation argued that longer-term UK growth prospects are subdued due to weak productivity, ageing, and long-term illness, but it also identified reforms in planning, skills, and healthcare as potential growth levers. This essay accepts that point. It does not claim that Britain has exhausted its policy options.

The second counterargument is historical. The post-1992 and post-1997 credibility regime remains a genuine partial challenge. It shows that institutional reform can alter expectations and performance. The reason it does not overturn the thesis is that it does not clearly solve today's combined problem: weak productivity, ageing, working-age ill-health, fiscal lock-in and weak state conversion.

There are also measurement limits. ONS notes that early GDP estimates are revised. Productivity data can differ materially between the main Labour Force Survey-based measure and experimental administrative-data approaches. Labour-market series require caution because survey response and weighting issues affect some employment and inactivity estimates. Public-service productivity is methodologically difficult. Long-run OBR projections are conditional scenarios rather than forecasts.

The claim is therefore falsifiable in two ways. Historically, it weakens if a clean post-war ordinary-peacetime counterexample is found that clears the four hurdles without relying on crisis, windfall or war legacy. Prospectively, it weakens if a future parliament delivers sustained peer-relative gains in GDP per head and productivity while improving contributor strength and stabilising fiscal lock-in.

However, despite the Labour Government having the largest majority since 2001, it has just suffered the worst local elections polling in its history. By any measure, the administration is weak, lacking direction and distrusted by most of the population. Not an ideal starting point for launching a radical change to the economy.

MAIN FINDINGS

The post-war record contains large British adjustments, but not a clean ordinary peacetime precedent for the combined adjustment now required. The 1960s and 1970s cases were crisis-led. The 1979 case was politically important but materially assisted by fiscal offsets. The 1992 and 1997 cases are the strongest partial challenges, but they solved a credibility problem more clearly than they solved a burden-stack problem. The 2010 case showed that governments can act hard without necessarily resetting the trajectory.

The central finding is therefore narrow but serious: reversing today's combination of weak living-standards momentum, weak productivity, demographic and health pressure, fiscal lock-in and weak state conversion would require a scale of institutional reform and policy execution not demonstrated in ordinary peacetime British governance since 1945.

IF THE TRAJECTORY DOES NOT CHANGE

If Britain's underlying trajectory is not materially changed by normal political processes, the main consequence might be a single moment of failure. It is more likely to be a cumulative change in the country's character.

Economically, more national income is absorbed by maintaining existing claims rather than expanding future capacity. Politically, elections continue to change governments but become less able to restore confidence that the system can alter direction. The state remains active, but it becomes progressively less developmental and more managerial: less able to raise living standards, more occupied with distributing constraint, and more dependent on institutions whose role is to administer rules rather than renew national direction.

In the short run, over roughly one parliament, the likeliest outcome is managed stagnation rather than collapse. Aggregate output can still grow, but a rising share of national income is already spoken for before any new programme of renewal begins. The political counterpart is that choices increasingly take the form of who pays more, who waits longer, which services are protected and which investments are deferred.

This matters for consent. British Social Attitudes reports that the 2024 election failed to restore trust and confidence: only 12% said they trusted governments to put the nation's interests above party interests just about always or most of the time, while only 19% thought Britain's system of governing needed little or no improvement. Turnout at the 2024 general election was 59.7%, the lowest since 2001. These figures do not imply democratic breakdown. They do suggest that electoral turnover is becoming less effective at renewing consent for a constrained trajectory. One can only guess at the negative effect on the credibility of politics resulting from the disastrous performance of the current Labour Government.

The medium-term political effect is detachment rather than immediate collapse. British Social Attitudes finds that 40% of respondents now say they do not feel closer to any political party, up from 29% in 2020, while support for changing the voting system has reached a record 60%. NatCen's 2026 first look also suggests weakening consensus over tax-and-spend choices. The country is seeing less stable attachment to the existing party system, weaker fiscal consensus and a growing search for alternative constitutional or electoral arrangements through which citizens hope change might still be made possible.

The country does not have to collapse to change profoundly. It can continue to function

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while moving from a system that can plausibly promise renewal to one that mainly manages constraint. In that setting, major positive adjustment becomes less likely to arrive through ordinary electoral alternation and more likely to depend on exceptional conditions: crisis, regime change, constitutional reworking, or a productivity shock powerful enough to alter the arithmetic.

APPENDIX

Data dictionary and series construction

The essay uses a two-track evidence base. A UK official track supports the main narrative on living standards, productivity, ageing, fiscal lock-in and state conversion. An international annual track supports peer-adjusted historical scoring. Derived indicators include the peer-adjusted GDP-per-head gap, peer-adjusted productivity gap, contributor-pressure proxy, fiscal lock-in ratio, fiscal discretion ratio and state-conversion ratio.

Pillar	Series	Source / code	Span	Use in essay
Living standards	Real GDP per head	ONS IHXW	1955 Q1-	Headline living-standards measure
Living standards	Headline real GDP	ONS ABMI	1948-	Context against GDP per head
Productivity	Output per hour worked	ONS LZVB / LZVD	1993 Q4-	Main UK productivity measure
Productivity	Business investment	ONS NPEL / CXNV	1997 Q1-	Investment and capital-deepening proxy
Ageing	Working-age and pensionable-age population; OADR	ONS 2022-based projections	2022-2047	Chronological dependency path
Contributors	Employment / inactivity by age	ONS A05 SA	2011-	Participation and labour attachment
Contributors	Long-term sickness inactivity	ONS LF69	1993-	Health-related drag on labour supply
Contributors	NEET 16-24	ONS NEET	2001-	Youth detachment indicator
Fiscal structure	TME, DEL, AME, receipts	OBR EFO March 2026	2024-25 to 2030-31	Fiscal size and discretion
Fiscal structure	Welfare, disability, incapacity, debt interest	OBR EFO March 2026	2024-25 to 2030-31	Medium-term lock-in and caseloads
Long run	Health, social care, state pensions	OBR FRS September 2024	2028-29 to 2073-74	Long-run lock-in path
State conversion	Public service productivity	ONS annual + quarterly PSP	1997-	State output relative to inputs
International annual	GDP/head, productivity proxy, employment ratio, OADR	World Bank indicators	1960- / 1991-	Peer-adjusted historical scoring

Episode methodology

The historical test uses common windows and a fixed comparator design so that episodes are judged on the same terms rather than by political reputation. The primary comparator basket is the United States, Canada, France, Italy and Japan. Sensitivity baskets use G7 excluding the UK and a frontier basket of the United States, Germany, France, the Netherlands and Sweden.

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Design element	Specification
Primary comparator basket	United States, Canada, France, Italy and Japan
Sensitivity basket A	G7 excluding the UK, for post-1991 comparisons
Sensitivity basket B	United States, Germany, France, Netherlands and Sweden
Episode windows	Baseline = T-3 to T-1; +5 = T+4 to T+6; +10 = T+9 to T+11
Core historical score	GDP per head vs peers; productivity proxy vs peers; contributor pressure; broad fiscal lock-in
Modern extension	ADR-style dependency; long-term sickness; public-service productivity; narrow lock-in
Counterexample rule	A true counterexample must improve GDP per head, productivity and contributors, and lower or absorb lock-in
Filters	Crisis-led, windfall-assisted, war-legacy and shock-contaminated windows are flagged rather than treated as ordinary politics

Episode sheets

The table below condenses the main historical contest cases used in the essay by separating the enabling condition, the measured result and the use of the case in the argument.

Episode	Enabling condition	Main finding	Verdict
1967 / 1976	Sterling and financing stress	Shows how Britain changes under external pressure rather than ordinary politics	Not a counterexample
1979	Political restructuring plus North Sea revenues and wider fiscal offsets	Important structural change, but not a clean precedent for today	Mixed / windfall-assisted
1992	ERM crisis and credibility repair	Strong GDP-per-head and productivity performance, but crisis-led and incomplete on lock-in	Strong partial exception
1997	Peacetime institutional reform	Best ordinary-peacetime challenge in the post-war record, but incomplete against today's combined burden	Serious partial challenge
2010	Large discretionary tightening under post-crisis constraint	Changed burdens without a clear durable trend reset	No full reset
2016	Plebiscitary regime change	Proof that ordinary politics can move the structure, but not in a growth-positive direction	Negative precedent
2022	Financial-stability intervention	Decisive action under market stress, not normal-cycle politics	Boundary case

Sensitivity tests

The historical conclusion should not depend on one comparator basket or one narrow definition of dependency. Four sensitivity checks therefore accompany the main text.

Test	Variation	Expected effect on conclusion
Comparator basket	Rerun with G7 ex-UK and frontier basket	Ranking should remain: 1967 fail; 1992/1997 strongest partials; 2010 no reset
Contributor pressure	Use OADR alone pre-1991; OADR divided by employment-population ratio post-1991; ADR-style reconstruction where feasible	Conclusion should not hinge on one dependency proxy
Lock-in definition	Broad historical lock-in vs modern narrow lock-in	Sign of the major episodes should remain unchanged
Contamination flags	Mark 2010 +10 and 2016 +5 windows as pandemic / energy-shock affected	Protects the argument from overclaiming contaminated comparisons

Measurement caveats

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- GDP revisions: early UK GDP estimates are revised over time, so no single first estimate should carry too much weight.
- Productivity measurement: ONS publishes both Labour Force Survey-based and experimental administrative-data approaches; short-run movements can differ materially.
- Labour-market data quality: recent labour-market series require caution because survey response and weighting issues affect some inactivity and employment estimates.
- Public-service productivity: public-service productivity is methodologically demanding and less comparable across countries than market-sector productivity.
- Long-run fiscal projections: OBR sustainability projections are conditional scenarios rather than forecasts; they show the direction and scale of pressure under stated assumptions.
- Historical category mapping: long-run spending categories such as social protection, health and debt interest are consistent enough for broad lock-in analysis, but not perfectly identical across decades.
- Trust series: there is no single continuous trust series from 1945 to the present, so the political-legitimacy discussion uses turnout, attachment and survey-based trust indicators.