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Meet Andy Burnham

In July 2026, the United Kingdom got its seventh prime minister in a decade when Andy Burnham replaced Keir Starmer as leader of the center-left Labour Party and head of government. Burnham's rise is remarkable not only because he returned to regional politics following a self-imposed exile, but because he has successfully recast himself from a conventional Westminster politician into a champion of Britain's forgotten regions. His ascent reflects many of the same forces that have reshaped politics across the developed world: frustration with centralized government, anger over stagnant living standards, and demands for a new economic model that spreads growth more evenly across society.

As we show in this report, Burnham's government is likely to blend economic nationalism, regional devolution, selective state intervention, and a pragmatic foreign policy rooted in domestic priorities. His administration promises to have significant implications for Britain's geopolitical posture, economic trajectory, and financial markets.

Biography

Andrew Murray Burnham was born in Aintree, near Liverpool, in 1970, and he grew up in a middle-class family in northwest England. His father was a telecommunications engineer and his mother was a medical receptionist. Raised in a Catholic household, Burnham has often

cited social justice and community solidarity as core influences on his political outlook.

After graduating from Fitzwilliam College, Cambridge, Burnham entered politics as a parliamentary researcher before becoming a special adviser in the government of Labour Prime Minister Tony Blair. [Elected as a member of parliament for Leigh in 2001, he steadily climbed the ministerial ladder, serving as chief secretary to the Treasury; secretary of state for Culture, Media and Sport; and secretary of state for Health.](#) He later served in several senior shadow-cabinet roles and unsuccessfully sought Labour Party leadership in both 2010 and 2015.

Figure 1



United Kingdom Prime Minister Andy Burnham
(Source: Aleksandra Dragoi, No. 10 Downing Street)

A turning point came in 2017, when Burnham left Parliament to become the first elected mayor of Greater Manchester. What initially appeared to be a political sidetrack became the foundation for his national revival. During his nine years as mayor, he developed a reputation as an advocate for

northern England, earning the nickname “King of the North.” His profile grew through leadership following the 2017 Manchester Arena bombing, clashes with Prime Minister Boris Johnson’s government during the coronavirus pandemic, innovative transport reforms, and campaigns to reduce homelessness.

Burnham’s return to parliament, election as party leader, and elevation to prime minister stemmed from the struggles faced by his Labour Party predecessor, Keir Starmer. Following his appointment as prime minister in July 2024, Starmer and his government quickly lost public support amid policy missteps and scandals. Party members began to worry about potentially being wiped out in the next election. [That discontent provided a political opening for Burnham, and he was able to return to parliament by winning a by-election in the municipality of Makerfield.](#) Within weeks, amid collapsing support for Starmer’s government, he became Labour leader and prime minister.

Political Philosophy

Burnham is difficult to place neatly on the conventional left-right spectrum. In economic policy, he retains many social democratic instincts, favoring a larger role for government, stronger public services, public influence over critical infrastructure, and stringent environmental-protection regulations. At the same time, he embraces private investment, a strong role for entrepreneurship, and place-based economic development.

We would summarize Burnham’s policy priorities as follows:

- Radical devolution of power from London to the regions;
- Reindustrialization;
- Public support for manufacturing and strategic industries;

- Fiscal pragmatism rather than ideological austerity;
- Greater public control of essential infrastructure; and
- A communitarian emphasis on local identity and civic pride.

Supporters often describe this worldview as “Manchesterism” because it emerged largely from Burnham’s experience governing Greater Manchester. The central idea is that local communities, rather than London bureaucrats, are best positioned to drive economic renewal. In our view, this is consistent with the way that non-elites in the US and many other developed countries have rebelled against large, distant, elite bureaucracies affecting their lives. Rather, they are seeking smaller, accessible institutions that they feel better reflect and respect their values.

Politically, it can be argued that Burnham resembles other contemporary regional populists in the UK and beyond. Like Nigel Farage, he frequently positions himself against the Westminster establishment. Like Boris Johnson before him, he has leveraged a successful mayoralty into a bid for national leadership. Yet unlike either figure, Burnham combines anti-establishment rhetoric with a center-left economic agenda.

In that sense, some observers see parallels between Burnham and the newly elected mayor of New York City, Zohran Mamdani. It’s not clear yet whether Burnham will govern as far to the left as Mamdani, a Democratic Socialist. Nevertheless, taken together, Burnham and Mamdani provide evidence that today’s political populism in the US, the UK, and elsewhere can be captured by left-wing politicians. Burnham and Mamdani could also signal how such leaders might really govern if more left-wing politicians gain power elsewhere.

Policy Agenda: Foreign Affairs

Unlike many recent British prime ministers, Burnham's primary focus is domestic. Nevertheless, his foreign policy appears likely to rest on the following three pillars.

Maintain NATO Commitments. Prime Minister Burnham has given no indication that he intends to weaken Britain's support for the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) or Ukraine. His early discussions with European and NATO leaders suggest continuity with the previous government's policies, rather than disruption. Britain's role as one of Europe's leading military powers is therefore expected to remain intact.

Boost Economic Sovereignty. Burnham's emphasis on domestic manufacturing and strategic industries reflects growing concern across the West regarding supply-chain vulnerabilities exposed by the pandemic, the war in Ukraine, and rising US-China rivalry. Like other leaders pursuing industrial policy, Burnham appears intent on strengthening domestic production capabilities in:

- Defense;
- Energy;
- Steel;
- Food production; and
- Advanced manufacturing.

Such policies are likely to align Britain more closely with broader trends toward economic security and industrial resilience across the developed world.

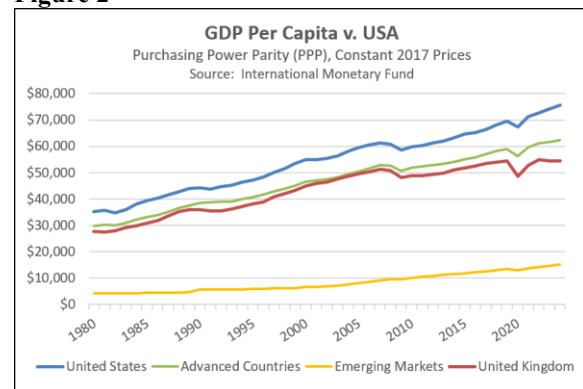
Improve EU Relations. [In the debate over Brexit a decade ago, Burnham argued that the UK should stay in the European Union, but he has now largely abandoned efforts to rejoin.](#) Instead, he appears focused on expanding trade, regulatory cooperation, and security coordination with the EU, while

respecting the political reality of Brexit. In our view, that points to incremental rapprochement with Europe rather than dramatic institutional reintegration.

Policy Agenda: Economics

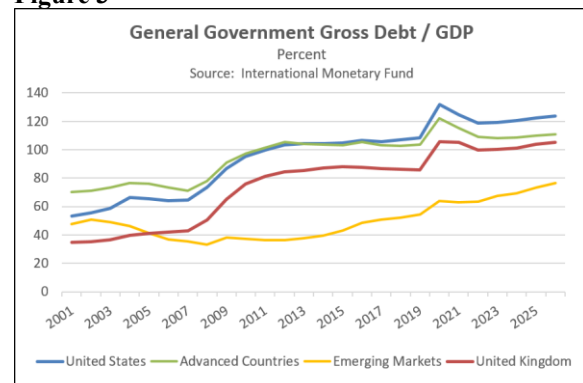
Prime Minister Burnham inherits an economy facing persistent challenges. Most importantly, British economic growth remains weak by historical standards (see Figure 2).

Figure 2



Productivity growth has been sluggish for more than a decade, regional disparities remain severe, and public finances are strained (see Figure 3). Voters continue to express frustration about housing affordability and the cost of living. Britain's industrial base has also shrunk substantially over recent decades, while economic activity is still heavily concentrated in London and southeast England.

Figure 3



Against this backdrop, Burnham argues that Britain requires not merely different policies but an entirely different economic model. The prime minister's economic policy agenda therefore focuses on the following areas.

Devolution. Burnham's signature policy is to devolve power away from London and Westminster. Instead, he has pledged what he calls the biggest-ever rebalancing of power in modern Britain. Under Burnham's proposals, the UK's regional governments would receive greater authority over housing, transport, skills training, economic development, and infrastructure investment. His proposed "Number 10 North" in Manchester symbolizes this effort. [This initiative will put branches of key ministries in Manchester to help ensure that important policy decisions are made with input from citizens in the north.](#) Burnham has even promised to work from the Manchester offices at least one day each week.

Reindustrialization. Burnham also wants to expand domestic UK manufacturing capacity in strategically important industries. Similar to industrial policies emerging in North America and elsewhere in Europe, this initiative would use public procurement, targeted incentives, and infrastructure spending to encourage factory investment in industries seen as critical to UK's future security and prosperity. Defense producers, advanced manufacturers, energy firms, and industrial suppliers are expected to be some of the key beneficiaries. Still, even favored industries won't necessarily have smooth sailing. [For example, Burnham has signaled that he will continue to withhold new licenses for energy firms seeking to drill for oil in the North Sea.](#)

Public Control of Services. Burnham's success in improving the public transport

system in Greater Manchester by franchising its previously fragmented bus lines has reinforced his belief that government should exert greater control over critical infrastructure. He appears particularly interested in expanded government influence over public transport systems, water utilities, energy networks, and housing development. For example, the likely restructuring of Thames Water may offer an early indication of this broader agenda.

Housing. Burnham has long championed the large-scale construction of public housing, land-use reform, and redevelopment of the UK's neglected town centers. Increased public investment in affordable housing appears likely to be a central component of his economic strategy.

Tax Reform. Perhaps the most controversial aspect of Burnham's agenda is his openness toward land-value taxation and broader property tax reform. Supporters view such measures as a way to encourage productive land use while reducing distortions created by existing taxes. Critics worry about disruptions to the housing market. Any movement in this direction would probably represent one of the UK's most significant tax reforms in decades. Separately, Burnham has also shown a willingness to cut taxes to promote favored industries or activities. [For example, one of his first moves upon becoming prime minister was to cut taxes for pubs, dance clubs, and live-music venues to ensure they can continue to serve his largely working-class political base.](#)

Investment Implications

Burnham's policies are likely to create clear winners and losers. Among UK firms with publicly traded *stocks*, we think companies tied to domestic investment and government procurement may outperform under his reindustrialization strategy. His policies

should especially benefit affordable housing developers, construction firms, engineering and industrial companies, defense contractors, and regional transport firms. In contrast, Burnham's policies could well weigh on regulated utilities facing greater state involvement and firms exposed to possible property tax reforms.

Burnham's policies could also have big implications for British government **bonds**. To date, Burnham has continued to endorse the UK's legacy fiscal rules and appears conscious of market constraints if he opens the fiscal spigot too aggressively. For example, as of this writing, he has avoided spelling out the financing of his proposals in any great detail. Nevertheless, Burnham's ambitions for housing, infrastructure, and regional development imply continued pressure for higher public spending. As a result, gilt yields may remain elevated compared to pre-pandemic norms.

At the same time, the trajectory of the British **pound** will depend heavily on whether investors view Burnham's policies as growth-enhancing. If devolution, infrastructure spending, and industrial policy boost productivity, the sterling could

appreciate over time. Conversely, concerns about excessive public spending, higher debt burdens, or interventionist policies could weigh on the currency in the near term.

In any case, the most important implication of Burnham's premiership may be that Britain is joining and perhaps bolstering a wider global trend in which governments seek greater resilience, stronger domestic industry, and more active economic management. In that sense, Burnham's rise mirrors developments across the US, Europe, and Japan. For investors, the key question is whether his regional development model can produce faster growth without generating unsustainable fiscal costs. If successful, Burnham could help reverse Britain's longstanding productivity malaise and inspire similar efforts elsewhere. If unsuccessful, he risks becoming yet another prime minister overwhelmed by the structural challenges that have consumed much of British politics since Brexit.

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