# UK Political Leaders Clash Over Immigration Policy Amidst Election Preparations



**Migrant Crossings and Immigration Policy Central to UK Election Debate**

**May 4, 2024 - English Channel:** An inflatable dinghy carrying migrants was spotted passing a French navy vessel as it headed towards England. This occurrence highlights ongoing immigration issues amidst the approaching UK election on July 4, 2024.

**Key Details:**
- **Prime Minister Rishi Sunak** and **Labour leader Keir Starmer** are primarily focusing on reducing legal migration.
- Both politicians are deeply divided over Sunak's plan to send asylum seekers to Rwanda.
- The plan faces criticism for being costly and potentially unethical, with many asylum seekers having legitimate claims.

**Recent Immigration Trends:**
- **Net migration** last year stood at 685,000, showing a decrease from 764,000 in 2022 but significantly higher compared to 2019.
- **Brexit** and labor shortages have shifted the source of migrant workers from the EU to countries like India, Nigeria, and Pakistan.
- New visa schemes and humanitarian programs for individuals from Ukraine, Afghanistan, and Hong Kong have contributed to the increase.

**Policy Stances:**
- **Sunak:**
 - Intends to initiate regular deportations to Rwanda despite ongoing legal challenges.
 - Plans to reduce annual migration through stricter visa rules and a legal cap on numbers.
- **Starmer:**
 - Proposes abandoning the Rwanda plan, instead focusing on combating smuggling gangs.
 - Advocates for a new Border Security Command and improvements in processing asylum claims and deportations.

**Poll Projections:**
- Recent **YouGov poll** suggests Labour could win 425 seats, achieving a historic majority, while the Conservatives might drop to 108 seats.
- Various parties, like the Liberal Democrats and the SNP, have different immigration stands, generally opposing the Rwanda scheme.

**Additional Developments:**
- Inflation rates have fallen, bringing economic issues into the debate.
- High-profile incidents and protests are influencing public sentiment, including a Just Stop Oil protest at Stonehenge condemned by both leaders.

This ongoing debate over immigration is a pivotal issue as the UK approaches its next general election.