

Reform closing gap on Tories as Farage returns to the fray

Poll reveals Conservative voters 'like a lot' of what he stands for

EXCLUSIVE

By Harriet Line
Deputy Political Editor

NIGEL Farage's return to the political front line has given his party a four-point boost, according to the latest poll by Lord Ashcroft.

In worrying news for Rishi Sunak, Reform UK is narrowing the gap with the Conservatives, which has fallen from 23 per cent of the vote share last week to 21 per cent.

The resurgent Right-wing party is now just six points behind with 15 per cent – up from 11 per cent last week when Mr Farage suddenly announced he would stand as a candidate in Clacton, Essex, and that he would take over as Reform's leader.

The Labour Party, meanwhile, continues to have a clear lead, but has slumped four points to 43 per cent, the poll found.

When voters are asked who would make the best PM, Lord Ashcroft's research – shared exclusively with the Daily Mail – continues to put Labour leader Sir Keir



Advancing: Reform's Nigel Farage and Lee Anderson yesterday

Starmmer well ahead of Mr Sunak. The Prime Minister is up one percentage point compared with last week, at 20 per cent – despite his D-Day blunder when he left the ceremonies in Normandy early – while the Labour leader is down one point on 37 per cent.

But writing in today's paper, Lord Ashcroft suggests this indicates things were 'already so bad' for the PM that 'not even' that gaffe 'could make them worse'.

The polling, carried out between June 6-10 with a sample size of 4,975 people, found 47 per cent of those leaning towards Reform UK said they would be more likely to vote Tory at this election if the Conservatives became more like Mr Farage's party.

According to the poll, 45 per cent of people who voted Conservative at the last general election in 2019 said they 'liked a lot' of what Mr Farage stands for, while 83 per cent of Labour voters said that they 'don't like what he

stands for'. Those leaning towards Reform also said the UK should leave the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) – often blamed for hampering Parliament's attempts to tackle illegal immigration – by 78 per cent to 13 per cent.

But overall, those surveyed supported remaining in the ECHR by 58 per cent to 27 per cent, with 16 per cent saying they did not know.

'Sent a jolt through the campaign'

Almost two-thirds of voters (65 per cent) think taxes will increase under Labour, compared with 57 per cent under the Conservatives.

Many voters also expect both legal and illegal migration to increase under a Labour government, with 33 per cent saying legal migration will be higher than it is now, and 34 per cent for illegal.

But they trust Labour to keep NHS waiting lists either the same or lower than, with just 18 per cent expecting them to increase.

Sir Keir remains more trusted to run the economy than ex-chancel-

lor Mr Sunak, but he has dropped a point compared with last week.

The poll was carried out after the first head-to-head TV debate last week, in which the Prime Minister repeatedly claimed that a Labour government would mean £2,000 of tax rises for every working household. Sir Keir later accused Mr Sunak of lying.

Lord Ashcroft writes that the return of Mr Farage – who originally said he would not be standing as a parliamentary candidate – has 'sent a jolt through the campaign'. He adds: 'Most of those currently leaning towards Reform said they would be more likely to vote Tory in future elections if it became more like Mr Farage's party in terms of the things it said and the policies it promised – previous Conservative voters were also more likely than not to agree.

'At the same time, wary voters see him as a troublemaker with a talent for publicity and wonder what his party stands for other than controlling immigration.

'But in an otherwise uninspiring election, many see Reform as a way of getting the attention they feel they have been denied.'

their six weeks of campaigning if, as seems now likely, they are defeated. A well-organised campaign with the right message can make a difference, galvanising support and reinforcing doubts about opponents. But when we ask former Tories why they have drifted away, seven in ten say the party is out of touch and hasn't delivered what it promised. A clear majority says it is untrustworthy and incompetent.

THAT can't be put right in 42 days – and whatever the merits of the policies in this week's manifesto, they are unlikely to help if people don't believe the Tories mean them or could make them happen if they do.

Labour, meanwhile, has been trying to reassure voters that it can be trusted on its historical weaknesses including tax, immigration and law and order.

People still have their doubts. I found only one in ten believing legal immigration would be lower after five years of Labour than it is now. People are more likely to think taxes would rise under Labour than the Tories (though majorities think tax would rise under both). Fewer than a third think Starmer would succeed in cutting NHS waiting times, his party's traditional territory. Many voters now regard the prospect of a Labour government with a sort of weary inevitability. The question is this: do former Tories who are not enamoured of Starmer or his party drag themselves to the polling station one more time to keep a Labour majority down and ensure a decent opposition? Or will they decide to withhold their support – or transfer it to someone else – to make sure the Tories get the point? If anything, the reaction to the week's events suggests they are becoming more determined to do the latter.

Lord Ashcroft is an international businessman, author, philanthropist and pollster. His research is at LordAshcroftPolls.com. Follow him on X/Facebook @LordAshcroft

Rishi's ratings were already so bad, his D-Day debacle barely changed a thing

by Lord Ashcroft



The second thing was the D-Day debacle. Rishi Sunak apologised for leaving the commemorations early and I don't doubt that he bitterly regrets the move.

He won't need reminding that, as well as being the wrong thing to do, the decision amounts to one of the great campaign blunders of all time. For the people taking part in my focus groups since the weekend, the incident confirms their view of a leader who is not unpatriotic but does seem chronically out of touch with the country and its priorities. Interestingly, however, the leadership ratings in my poll have barely twitched since last week. This doesn't mean that Friday's events were

unimportant. It is more ominous than that, suggesting that things were already so bad for Sunak that not even a blunder on this scale could make them worse.

A kindly observer who has worked on election campaigns (if you can imagine such a creature) might say in Sunak's defence that, when things are going wrong, the extreme pressure can mean the protagonists no longer see the wood for the trees. Bad decisions ensue.

There is some truth to this, though it remains barely believable that no one sounded the alarm on the retreat from Normandy. But, after the election, it would be a mistake for the Conservatives to blame

LAST week I wrote about the millions of uncertain voters who would determine the outcome of this election, especially those who voted Conservative in 2019 but now say they haven't yet made their minds up or might stay at home.

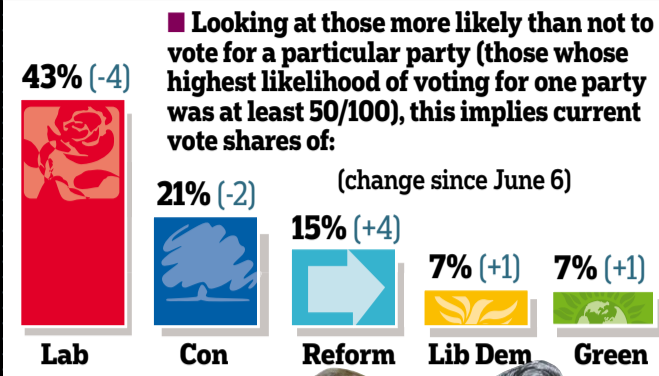
And they're still there – only 44 per cent of all voters say they've decided how to vote, according to my latest survey. But the past week has certainly given them a couple more things to think about.

First was the return of Nigel Farage to the political front line, propelling his Reform UK party to within touching distance of the Conservatives in some polls. In my survey – which looks at voters who put their chances of voting for one party at 50 or more out of 100 – we find Reform up to 15 per cent from last week's 11 per cent, with the Conservatives down two points to 21 per cent while 43 per cent say they are most likely to vote Labour. It's not surprising that Farage has sent a jolt through the campaign. In an otherwise uninspiring election, many see Reform as a way of finally getting the attention they feel they have been denied. Two thirds of the 2019 Tories say they like what he stands for and nearly half would like to see him in a senior position in government.

At this stage, most voters think he will fail in his ambition to take over the Conservatives – even if most of those currently leaning towards Farage's party said they would be more likely to vote for the Tory Party in future elections if it became more like Reform in terms of the things it said and the policies it promised.

Undecided voters who had previously voted Conservative were more likely than not to agree. More generally, many wary voters see him as a troublemaker with a talent for publicity and wonder what his party stands for other than controlling immigration

THE STATE OF PLAY WITH JUST THREE WEEKS TO GO



If the Conservatives / Labour were in government after the election, do you think taxes over the next few years would:

	%	Con	Lab
Increase by a lot	26	30	
Increase by a little	31	35	
Stay about the same	19	17	
Fall by a little	11	5	
Fall by a lot	1	1	
Don't know	12	13	

Who do you think would make the best Prime Minister?

	%	All	Con	Lab	Lib Dem
Rishi Sunak	20	45	2	12	
Keir Starmer	37	12	72	54	
Don't know	43	43	26	35	

HOW PARTIES' 2019 VOTERS FEEL NOW

If the Conservative Party became more like Reform UK in the things it said and policies it promised, would that make you more likely or less likely to vote for a Conservative Party at the General Election on July 4?

	%	All	Con	Lab	Lib Dem
More likely	14	31	2	4	
Less likely	11	13	10	22	
No difference – I would vote Conservative anyway	9	20	1	2	
No difference – I would not vote Conservative anyway	51	21	80	64	
Don't know	16	16	7	8	

HOW PARTIES' 2019 VOTERS FEEL NOW

Here are some things people have said about the political parties. Please tick all of those you think apply to them:

	%	Con	Lab	Lib Dem	Reform UK
Willing to take tough decisions for the long term	18	17	5	12	
Clear about what they stand for	11	13	12	21	
Has the right priorities for the country	9	23	11	14	
Shares my values	8	20	13	12	
Competent and capable	6	18	7	5	
On the side of people like me	5	24	13	14	
Will do what they say they'll do	4	12	6	10	
Is united	2	13	17	12	
None of these	71	54	65	66	

By David Churchill
Chief Political Correspondent

LABOUR was mocked yesterday over a 'dodgy dossier' claiming the Tories' pledges would send annual mortgage payments soaring by £4,800.

Shadow Chancellor Rachel Reeves published the document, which claimed tax cuts announced in the Tory manifesto just hours earlier were 'unfunded' and would send mortgage costs rocketing.

But within minutes, the figure was criticised by experts for barely being plausible. Embarrassingly, Labour published a 'corrected' version of the document after it was pointed out some figures evaluating Tories' plans had pluses and minuses mixed up.

This dispute comes after a separate row erupted last week over Tory claims that Labour's own plans would force taxes up on families by £2,094.

Yesterday Ms Reeves, unveiling the document Tory Manifesto: The Money's Not There, denied cherry-picking the 'scariest' figures. She also dodged the question of why she said in her speech that it 'will' increase mortgage

Ridicule for Reeves after she publishes 'dodgy dossier'..twice

payments by £4,800 while in the document it merely says that they 'could' rise this much. Asked if she was not 'guilty here of doing the thing you accuse the Tories of?', she replied: 'So, if you go through the documents, par-

'Document is full of nonsense'

ticularly the scorecard, it sets out £71billion of unfunded commitments during the course of this Parliament. The Treasury's estimate shows a one percentage point increase in

government borrowing adds 56 basis points to mortgage rates and that's where the figure of £4,800 during the course of the next Parliament comes from.'

However, the £71billion figure assumes the Tories would abolish National Insurance completely – which it has not pledged to do.

And the document merely states 56 basis points 'could' be added to mortgage rates and that payments 'could' increase by £4,800.

A Conservative Party spokesman said: 'Rachel Reeves' dodgy dossier is full of complete nonsense and capped off with the extraordinary claim that it will

cost the taxpayer £5.7billion to cut the civil service back to pandemic levels.'

Sir Keir Starmer slammed Rishi Sunak for a 'Jeremy Corbyn-style manifesto' before the Tories launched its General Election plan.

The Labour leader's statement raised eyebrows given he served in Mr Corbyn's shadow cabinet and said in 2019 the manifesto offered 'real change' and 'an ambition to meet the needs' of the country and campaigned for it.

Yesterday Sir Keir claimed the Tories 'load everything into the wheelbarrow, don't provide the funding and hope that nobody notices. The money isn't there.'

Labour won't rule out tax hike on assets

By Claire Ellicott
Whitehall Editor

WES Streeting has refused four times to rule out hiking capital gains tax if Labour wins the general election.

The shadow health spokesman sparked fears the party could increase the duty on the sale of assets in its first budget to raise money. He said a rise would not be included in Labour's general election manifesto, published tomorrow, adding that nothing in it 'requires an increase'.

And the party has so far said it will not raise income tax, National Insurance and VAT.

Mr Streeting told the BBC's Radio 4 Today: 'All of the manifesto promises we make on Thursday will be promises that we can keep and the country can afford. As I say, nothing in our manifesto requires increases in capital gains tax.'