



DAILY EXPRESS

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Hateful bile has no place in our politics, Mr Farage

RISHI Sunak is understandably angry and upset after a campaigner from Nigel Farage's Reform was recorded making deeply offensive comments about him.

The Prime Minister doesn't want his daughters to hear their father subjected to this type of vile racist abuse. He is right to speak out. The shocking language caught on tape has no place in a civilised society.

Britain is a place where people can succeed, regardless of their race or ethnicity.

We share the view expressed by Mr Sunak on many occasions that this is something to be proud of. In some ways this makes the incident even more appalling. We all know prejudice exists, but we usually succeed in keeping it out of politics.

Verbal attacks on Muslims and migrants, and disgusting remarks by a canvasser about LGBT people, were also ignorant and wrong. The case for Reform's defence is that it is a relatively young party, which only recently decided to fight this General Election in earnest. It may not have the same structures in place as the traditional parties to prevent the wrong people joining.

Mr Farage says the activists concerned have been kicked out, which is good to hear. But he will know some voters will be wondering whether the incident tells us something about the culture within Reform.

Potential Reform voters will not back a party that tolerates racism and prejudice.

Mr Farage must demonstrate that he has cleaned things up, and do so quickly.

Cops Stop Oil tormentors

SUMMER holidays have been saved thanks to the hard work of our police officers foiling yet another idiotic Just Stop Oil protest. Disrupting airports during the summer break would have caused misery for untold numbers of passengers hoping to enjoy a long-awaited getaway, including families with children.

Police conducted a major and successful operation to stop their protesters in their tracks. Whether it's damaging paintings, desecrating Stonehenge or attempting to stop flights taking off, Just Stop Oil appear hell-bent on alienating the public.

Of course, this doesn't mean that tackling climate change isn't essential. The behaviour of a few attention-seekers is irrelevant to the debate about how to preserve our planet. But the best thing Just Stop Oil could do to advance their cause is to disband and go home.

Grateful to brave heroes

ARMED Forces Day is when the nation shows its support and appreciation for those serving their country, veterans and cadets as well as their families.

The Queen speaks for us all when she thanks our heroes for "everything you do to protect this country of ours".

Pictures: JOE GIDDENS/PA, YUI MOK/PA, STEFAN ROUSSEAU/PA

IN SIX days it will all be over. The votes will be counted, the results will be in, and the new prime minister will be off to see the King. The preceding six weeks, with its succession of gaffes, mishaps and scarcely believable scandals, will seem like a slightly surreal dream – or, if you're Rishi Sunak, a nightmare.

Most people think they know what will happen. Keir Starmer not becoming prime minister on Friday morning would make the shocks of 2016 (Brexit, Trump, Leicester City winning the Premier League) look tame.

Less clear is the scale of the likely Conservative defeat. More than half of voters now expect a large Labour majority, according to my latest polling – up from just over a third in the days after Rishi's surprise announcement in the Downing Street drizzle. Most of those who expect such a result say this is because of the polls and predictions they see in the news – and it is true that many studies point to varying degrees of Labour landslide.

But as a wise man once said, it's hard to make predictions, especially about the future. A huge Labour victory is certainly one scenario, but there are others.

My poll found that only half the country says they have definitely made up their mind how to vote.

And in my focus groups around the country, the lack of enthusiasm for Keir Starmer and Labour is unmistakable.

These two factors combined – the chance of a landslide for an unpopular party, and the number of voters apparently still in play – gives some Conservatives hope of averting annihilation.

Perhaps, they say, fears of a Labour "supermajority" will persuade some former Tories who have drifted away from the party to return – especially those who have drifted in the direction of Nigel Farage and Reform UK. On the face of it, there are reasons to think this could work.

My research regularly finds that those leaning towards Reform thoroughly dislike the prospect of a Labour government.

They are as likely as Tories to believe Labour will mean higher taxes, more debt and a turbocharging of the woke agenda (to which Reformers are particularly allergic).

They doubt, to put it mildly, that Labour will usher in more competent government, lower NHS waiting times, reduced crime rates, more manageable living costs or – especially – more effective control of immigration.

Reformers are even more likely than Tories to oppose building on the green belt, as proposed in the Labour manifesto.

Some also suspect, despite the party's protestations, Labour harbours the intention of unwinding Brexit and re-entangling Britain in the institutions of the EU.

KEIR Starmer himself only intensifies these suspicions. Reform-leaners tend to see him as a ditherer who seems unable to make a decision and stick to it – the U-turn over Diane Abbott's candidacy at the start of the campaign is often cited – and whose values are those of the North London human rights lawyer he once was.

However unfairly, they often mention the failure to prosecute Jimmy Savile during Starmer's time as director of public prosecutions as evidence of poor judgement at best.

Most of them believe his previous support for Jeremy Corbyn suggests Starmer is more left-wing than he now says he is.

Easy to see, then, why some Tories hope that in the quiet of the polling booth, Reformers will think twice about further depleting the Conservative tally and boosting the chances of a big majority for Labour and its lefty leader. After all, in my latest survey, 81 per cent of those switching to Reform said they were dissatisfied with



DECISIONS: Voters disenchanted with the Tories are not spoiled for choice

Voters leaning towards Reform UK know it's easy to dream up plans you'll never deliver



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the Tories but would rather have a Conservative government than a Labour one. The trouble is, they know they're not going to get one.

If the election were on a knife-edge, many Reform-leaners would undoubtedly hold their noses one more time and put their cross in the Tory box to keep the Labour menace at bay. But they don't believe it is – and warnings about a Labour "supermajority" only underline the point.

Last week, my polling found only 17 per cent of Tory to Reform defectors felt the idea of a Labour landslide made them more inclined to stick with the Conservatives.

Nearly twice as many said that if the

Tories were going to lose badly anyway, they might as well vote for another party.

If the result is a foregone conclusion, why not make their point and be heard?

Any appeal to vote Conservative to ensure a Labour government faces a decent opposition presupposes that the Tories are best placed to hold the new administration to account.

Reform-leaners doubt this too. I found that four out of five likely Reform voters believe their new party would be the most effective opposition to an incoming Labour government; only one in 20 of them thought the Tories would do a better job. Nor are Tory to Reform switchers in

'Only half the country says they have definitely made up their mind how to vote'

any mood to come to the rescue of their old party, at least in its current form.

In another poll during the campaign, I discovered that rather than wanting to keep as many Tory MPs in Parliament as possible, they were more likely to agree that "the Conservatives need a huge defeat so they get the message". A major part of that message is that the Conservatives have broken their promises on migration, both legal and illegal.

Controlled migration has been promised in every election since 2010, but numbers have risen in every parliament since.

Whether this is down to incompetence or deceit on the part of Tory or Tory-led governments over the last 14 years is debatable enough, but neither would be a good answer.

Reform-leaners are exasperated by the failure to deal with small boat migration and the gigantic cost of housing illegal migrants.

They feel over-taxed and have seen the burden rise steadily under a party for whom low taxes were supposed to be a central mission. They are sceptical about net zero, new ideas about gender identity and the spread of the "diversity, equity and inclusion" agenda throughout the supposedly Conservative-run public sector.

They see police forces unwilling or unable

to deal with aggressive protests that bring everyday life to a standstill and public services deteriorating as their costs spiral.

What, they ask, has the Tory party done to deserve their vote, let alone their loyalty?

Some argue that the answer is for the Conservatives to offer more robust, Farage-like policies across the board, and especially on tax and immigration.

This might have a superficial appeal, but it misses the main point, which is that in their eyes, the Tories have lost credibility.

Only one in 20 Reform-leaners say the Conservative party is "on the side of people like me" or is "competent and capable". Fewer than one in 10 think it has the right priorities for the country.

As for the leadership, the two major dramas of the campaign have only reinforced the view of a party that has lost touch with the country.

The D-Day debacle – when Rishi Sunak came home early to record a TV interview – showed a prime minister who was too aloof

and – as a focus group participant insightfully put it earlier this week – "too corporate" to share their instincts.

The betting scandal, meanwhile, looks to many like a metaphor for the party's recent years in office, where rules were for other people. Notions of public service seem to them to have gone rapidly out of fashion.

CRUCIALLY and damningly, only 2 per cent of Reformers – one in 50 – think the Conservatives "will do what they say they'll do". In other words, Rishi Sunak could have unveiled a manifesto full of Reform policies, but the voters they were aimed at wouldn't believe they would ever happen.

Only two thirds of those leaning towards Reform say they have finally decided how to vote. Recent events will give some of them serious pause for thought. Farage's claim that

the West "provoked" the war in Ukraine sounds to many like an excuse for Putin's invasion and will go down badly with wavering former Tories for whom defence is high on the agenda.

The shocking remarks by Reform campaigners in recent days, including a racist term used about PM Rishi Sunak, will appal many others. Farage has been quick to distance himself from their views, but many voters who want firm policies will run a mile from a party that starts to look like a bunch of racists and bigots.

Reform-leaning voters also know in their hearts that it is easy for a small party to dream up attractive-sounding policies it will never have to actually deliver.

A number of them will probably switch back to the Tories before Thursday.

But others will think: if the election is in the bag for Labour anyway, why not vote for a party that stands for what they believe in and a leader who says what they think?

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