

POLL BRIEFING

Ministers rap Royal Mail as postal ballots are delayed

By Kumail Jaffer Political Correspondent

DELAYS to postal ballots being delivered to voters are being 'urgently' investigated, a minister has said.

More than 90 constituencies have raised concerns about ballots failing to arrive on time, with Royal Mail and the Government blaming each other for the mess.

Postal affairs minister Kevin Hollinrake criticised Royal Mail for failing to anticipate the demand, saying it was 'not acceptable' for voters to still be waiting.

Yesterday, health minister Maria Caufield said: 'Kevin is investigating this urgently. If people have only just received their postal vote, they can take it to their polling station on election day and it will still be counted.'

Royal Mail has said there is 'no backlog of postal votes' and said those posted on time 'will be delivered prior to polling day'.

Extra staff are now being drafted in to make sure that ballots are collected from postal sorting offices and reach counts before polls close at 10pm tomorrow.

Last night Sir Keir Starmer said: 'We can't have these people who are entitled to a vote not being able to exercise it. So get on with the job, I'd say, and if the Post Office minister hasn't met them, do it now in the next hour or two. Seriously, we're running out of time.'

Labour eco bid 'will boost China'

ED MILIBAND'S 'fantasy eco plans' will create tens of thousands more jobs in China than the UK, senior Tories claim.

The Shadow Energy Security Secretary wants to triple Britain's solar power to help deliver zero-carbon electricity by 2030.

It will mean a huge increase in solar panels - and more jobs in an industry that currently supports only 6,400 people.

But Tory analysis suggests the clean power drive will create 57,470 jobs in China but only 14,933 in the UK because of the speed and scale required.

Deputy Prime Minister Oliver Dowden said: 'Labour aren't content with destroying jobs in the North Sea oil industry by refusing licences. Now they want to ship them to China.'

Poll that shows

How allies can return to the fold and smash Labour lead

By David Churchill Chief Political Correspondent

LABOUR'S lead over the Tories could dip into 'single figures' if enough disaffected voters return to the Conservative fold, a new Lord Ashcroft poll finds today.

The findings suggest there remains a lot to play for ahead of tomorrow's General Election and that a Labour supermajority can yet be avoided.

The former Tory Treasurer's latest survey, shared exclusively with the Daily Mail, found Labour's vote share lead has fallen by two percentage points to 19 since last week.

But this could plummet further to 13 if former Tory backers who are undecided or don't intend to vote return to the Conservative fold.

And that lead could even fall below ten points if enough of those who have switched from the Tories to Reform UK return to the party, it predicts.

Lord Ashcroft stressed this was 'unlikely' since three-quarters of those intending to back Reform have suggested they won't change their mind. However, the poll of more than 5,000 people will raise Tory hopes that the party could avoid a wipeout.

The findings will also give fresh impetus to Tory efforts on the final day of campaigning to persuade disaffected former supporters to return and head off a Labour landslide.

It came amid warnings that former Conservative voters and those still undecided risk sleep-

Voters oppose Farage on Russia



War: Russian president Vladimir Putin

MORE than two-thirds of voters disagree with Nigel Farage's comments about the West being to blame for Russia's invasion of Ukraine - including nearly half of his own supporters.

Lord Ashcroft's poll found 68 per cent of all voters think Ukraine 'had every right to try to join Nato and the EU'.

They also said it would have been 'wrong for the West to discourage those ambitions' over fears of provoking Vladimir Putin.

This included 77 per cent of Tories, 78 per cent of Labour backers and 47 per cent of people who say they'll vote Reform.

Just 12 per cent of all voters said the 'West could and should have discouraged' Ukraine from trying to join Nato and the EU because the move would provoke Putin.

Reform leader Mr Farage has been accused of 'cuddling up to the Kremlin' over comments he made two weeks ago.

Mr Farage told the BBC that the West had 'provoked' Putin into invading Ukraine after allowing more eastern European nations to join Nato and the EU and by accepting Kyiv's desire to start talks.

walking into ten years of an 'unchecked and unaccountable' Labour government that would hike taxes if they don't return to the Tory fold.

Previous surveys have suggested the Tories could be reduced to a derisory rump of less than 100 MPs, and that the Liberal Democrats could even come close to winning as many seats.

It would mark a dramatic turnaround from the 365 seats won in 2019 under Boris Johnson. But

'Sunak could avoid a wipeout'

Lord Ashcroft's poll found that nearly eight in ten Reform supporters say a Labour supermajority would be bad for Britain.

Some 72 per cent of those who voted Tory in 2019 said the same.

Overall more people think

Labour winning a supermajority would be a negative as opposed to a positive - 36 per cent think it would be a good thing compared to 37 per cent who don't.

Meanwhile more than four in ten voters said they haven't 'definitely decided' how they will vote - suggesting millions of ballots are still up for grabs with just 24 hours until polls open.

And, in a sign that Rishi Sunak's last-ditch campaign push is bearing fruit, the survey found that Labour leader Keir Starmer's lead over him in terms of who would make the best premier fell three points.

Labour's overall vote share was down two points to 38, while a separate megapoll by Redfield & Wilton found it has fallen by one point with the Conservatives up three.

In a sign that many voters are not convinced by the alternatives

...but Tories must not

HERE'S what we know. When we ask people their chances of voting for a particular party at the General Election on a scale from zero to 100, 38 per cent of those who express a preference say they're leaning towards Labour (which is lower than at any point in the campaign to date).

Another 19 per cent of voters favour the Tories while 18 per cent favour Reform UK.

But we also know that almost half of all voters are yet to make up their minds.

And that, intriguingly, more than one in five of those who voted Conservative in 2019 still say, either, that they don't know what they'll do - or that they will not vote at all.

When we make them choose, three-quarters of them say they would rather have a Conservative government than a Labour one.



by Lord Ashcroft

Uninspired though they are by Rishi Sunak, the fact is they still prefer him over Keir Starmer by a decisive margin.

We don't know if they will show up on election day, of course, or which way they'll break if they do. If all of these people - former Tories who say they don't know or won't vote but that, when push comes to shove, they prefer the Conservatives - do turn out for Rishi Sunak, my poll shows Labour's lead narrowing from 19 points to 13 points.

And that is before we take into account those voters who have shifted from the Conservatives to Nigel Farage's Reform UK. If a

significant chunk of these 'Reformers' do return to the Tories at the last minute, the Labour lead could narrow into single figures.

This, however, seems unlikely. Three-quarters of likely Reform voters say they have made up their minds - which is the same high proportion as among those leaning towards Labour or the Tories.

But most pollsters show that backing for Reform is down from its recent peak.

Nigel Farage has not had the best of weeks. My poll finds that most voters reject his assertion that the West 'provoked' Russia's invasion of Ukraine by encouraging its

how EVERY vote counts

THE STATE OF PLAY WITH JUST ONE DAY TO GO

■ If Labour win the election on July 4, which of the following comes closest to your view about the future of the Conservative Party (whether you want it to happen or not)?

	%	All	Con	Lab	Lib Dem	Reform UK
I think the Conservatives will bounce back quite quickly and will seriously challenge Labour at the next election	12	36	6	8	9	
I think the Conservatives will take a few years to recover, but they will be back as a serious challenge to Labour at future elections, even if not the next one	51	55	62	60	36	
I think the Conservatives could be finished as a major party, and something else will emerge to take their place	23	4	24	23	47	
Don't know	15	5	8	9	8	

■ Looking at those more likely than not to vote for a particular party (those whose highest likelihood of voting for one party was at least 50/100), this implies current vote shares of:

	%	Lab	Con	Reform	Lib Dem	Green
38%	19%	18%	11%	8%		

■ Thinking about the Russian invasion of Ukraine, and countries in Eastern Europe joining Nato and the EU, which of the following statements do you most agree with?

	%	All	Con	Lab	Lib Dem	Reform UK
Ukraine had every right to try and join Nato and the EU - it would have been wrong for the West to discourage those ambitions just because they might provoke Vladimir Putin	68	77	78	86	47	
The West could and should have discouraged Ukraine from trying to join Nato and the EU since these ambitions were bound to provoke Vladimir Putin	12	8	6	6	32	
Don't know	20	15	16	9	21	

take false comfort in findings

neighbouring countries to join Nato or the European Union. More than two-thirds - including half of those leaning to Reform - say Ukraine had every right to join these bodies and that it would have been wrong to discourage those ambitions just because it might anger Putin.

Racist and homophobic comments from Reform campaigners will not have helped, either - although if Farage is proved right that Channel 4 used an actor to set up a recent undercover expose of the party, we could be in for a dramatic late twist.

I found that voters leaning towards Reform overwhelmingly think a Labour supermajority would be a bad thing for Britain. After all, these voters are more likely than most to think Labour will mean higher taxes, more debt, an even less-effective approach to controlling immigration and possibly, in some form, a step back towards the EU.

Some strategists hope that such fears will

encourage those flirting with Reform to come back to the Conservatives, but the argument cuts both ways.

As I found last week, few Reform-leaning voters said the idea of a big Labour majority made them more inclined to vote Tory to ensure a proper opposition.

This group was more likely to say that, if the Conservatives were going to lose badly, they might as well back someone else. It could be that the more they hear about a landslide, the freer they feel to make their point - and vote for a party they can get excited about. That party isn't the Tories.

In my poll, most Reform-minded voters disapproved of Sunak aides betting on the election date. They said it proved that people in power thought the rules didn't apply to them - a long-standing impression of the Tories that goes back at least as far as 'Partygate'. It is hardly the best platform from which to launch a last-ditch appeal.

Indeed, nearly half said that, if Labour win tomorrow as expected, the Conservatives could be finished as a major party.

Voters' general weariness is summed up by the fact that surprisingly few - only just over a quarter - think that any one or other of the political parties would make a great deal of difference over the coming years, either to their personal situation or to the major challenges facing the country.

This weariness even extends towards the likely winners. In focus groups in competitive seats around the country - usually comprising the kind of disgruntled former Tories that Labour has been trying to attract - we have not encountered anything approaching real enthusiasm for Starmer.

Even likely Labour voters are more pessimistic than optimistic about the future of Britain over the next few years.

Yet, with the centre-Right divided, we could see Labour win a commanding major-

ity on a lower vote share than they achieved in 2017, a level of support which resulted in a hung parliament at the time.

And Labour could be in power for a while. Only a quarter of voters - and only half of Tories and Reformers - expect that a newly elected Labour government would be thrown out at the following General Election.

The question is whether Starmer does anything with his time in office. Labour's relative unpopularity suggests it could be tough going for him, after all.

Not that the Conservatives should take false comfort from any of this.

They would do better to reflect on how such an unconvincing opposition as Labour looks set to sweep them aside.

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