

# Tory MPs 'give Kemi until next spring to see off Farage threat – or face a leadership challenge'



FLYING HIGH: Nigel Farage

CONSERVATIVE MPs are privately giving Kemi Badenoch a deadline of spring 2026 to shift the polls or face a reckoning.

The Tory leader is under mounting pressure to face down the threat of Reform UK.

Senior party figures are 'watching and waiting', ready to force through a leadership challenge if Nigel Farage's insurgent party continues to gain momentum.

Ms Badenoch – who this month marked 100 days as leader – has been criticised for not having a strategy to tackle Reform, which has overtaken the Conservatives in

By Anna Mikhailova

DEPUTY POLITICAL EDITOR

several polls. A Tory source said: 'MPs are giving her a deadline of next spring. If she can't turn it around by then, she's gone.'

It comes as the Conservative leader claimed it could take two years for the public to start taking the Tories seriously again.

Asked whether voters are listening to her party, Ms Badenoch said: 'Not yet, no. I think it takes time. A political analyst told me it takes about two years.' She told The Aus-

tralian: 'I expected the first 18 months of this job to be horrendous. The public are not yet ready to hear they need to go back to the Conservatives.' However, senior members of the Conservative Party machine – including those involved with fundraising – are privately sympathetic to Mr Farage and are keeping lines of communication open.

One source said: 'If Boris [Johnson] doesn't come back, then Nigel is the only alternative. We cannot ignore him – we need to start seeing Reform as a branch of the Conservative Party.' They are frustrated by the impression Ms Badenoch and

her inner circle 'have no idea what to do about Reform'.

Mr Farage privately says there are 50 Tory MPs he wants to join him and he has 'stars' he is urging to defect, including Conservative heavyweight Lord Frost.

Friends of the peer said he has no plans to come over but added that he is taking Reform 'seriously'.

Meanwhile, some in Ms Badenoch's team say they should bring Mr Farage into the fold early to kill off his momentum. 'We will do what we did to the Lib Dems,' one front-bench said. 'We bring Reform into coalition and strangle them.'

## Starmer is so out of touch with ordinary people... they think he'll holiday on a super-yacht



By LORD ASHCROFT

FORMER TORY PARTY DEPUTY CHAIRMAN

**M**Y LATEST polling makes unhappy reading both for Labour and the opposition – at least, the official Opposition. Just one in seven voters say they are satisfied with the new Government, including only three in ten of those who voted for it.

Ask people what recent political news they remember and they will talk about the cancelled winter fuel allowance, the early release of prisoners, lax immigration controls, ministers' freebie clothes and tickets, and – especially – higher taxes.

As the 'internationally renowned' economist Rachel Reeves puzzles over how to promote economic growth, voters have already clocked that her actions so far seem calibrated to stall it, not least her ingenious plan to spread prosperity by making it more expensive to employ people. Those working in small businesses are dreading the impact of higher National Insurance from April.

**'Higher taxes, cuts in winter fuel and lax borders are all voters talk about'**

While people can debate the merits of plans for a third runway at Heathrow and of easing the process for big infrastructure projects, any benefits seem remote to families struggling with bills today.

'We just want to work and have our wages in our pockets and pay a reasonable amount of tax and have services that actually function,' as one frustrated voter succinctly put it.

Nor do many feel that things will improve if only they give Labour enough time: one voter in five thinks they have the right plan and that it will lead to things getting better.

For a Government supposedly devoted to the interests of working people, Labour already feel surprisingly out of touch to many voters. Strikingly, people often talk about Sir Keir Starmer as they used to talk about the Tories.

Where would he go on holiday, we asked a recent focus group. Mauritius or the Maldives, came the answer, or a yacht in the Caribbean – first-class and all-inclusive.

Unfortunately, the fact that he feels remote doesn't mean he seems like a statesman: asked whether they had more confidence in him to negotiate a good relationship with the EU or the US, half said that they didn't trust him to

do either. The sobering point for the official Opposition is that despite all these complaints and more, half of those who are dissatisfied with the Labour Government say they would still prefer it to a Conservative one.

Overall, when forced to choose, a majority would rather have this Labour Government than the Tories. Kemi Badenoch trails the unpopular Starmer by a substantial margin when we ask who would make the best prime minister – and by even more when we introduce Reform's Nigel Farage into the equation.

There are two main reasons for this. One is that, although people are tiring of hearing Labour blam-

ing everything on the previous government, they know the party will be in power for another three or four years so they might as well see how things pan out.

The other is that the Tories are still firmly in the doghouse; few have any interest in what they have to say.

After five leadership changes inside nine years and an often-undistinguished record from their long stint in power, the party's brand has taken a largely self-inflicted battering.

In this respect, the Conservatives don't have a Kemi problem so much as Kemi has a Tory problem. The same would apply whoever was in charge.

The Tories' new immigration policy illustrates the point perfectly. In my focus groups, many nodded along to a video of Badenoch explaining that she would double the time before newcomers could apply to stay indefinitely and that criminals and welfare claimants would be banned. But the response was universal: 'Why are they saying it now? Why didn't they do it while they were in?'

My poll found that although half the country liked the policy, two-thirds of those questioned did not believe the Conservatives would implement it if elected.

Badenoch's two biggest challenges are to gain a hearing for the Conservatives and to differentiate

herself from Reform, a party in the luxurious position of never having let anyone down because it has never had to deliver.

She warned last week about 'rage without reason, anger without the ability to action,' and she is surely right to define the Tories against such easy populism. But the Conservatives are in no position to act for the time being, and they would not be trusted to do so if they were.

Badenoch has ruled out a pact with Reform, and the insurgent party's voters seem no keener on the idea. They want to challenge the political establishment, not rejoin it, and my polling shows they expect big gains at the next election under their own steam.

The fact that some recent surveys have put them ahead of both

**'Reform have ruled out pacts – they expect to make big gains at the election'**

main parties only adds weight to that belief.

If anger is fruitless, action impossible and alliances off the table, perhaps what is required from Badenoch is an honest, serious and appropriately self-critical diagnosis that links Labour's shortcomings and the state of the country with the Tories' failings in office.

That would be a step towards rebuilding the trust and credibility without which even the most appealing policies will be dismissed as empty.

Paradoxically, the tougher things get for Labour, the more pressure is heaped on the Conservatives.

They expect to benefit from the Government's travails, and they may start to panic if they don't. But people will want evidence of real reflection and change before they give the Tories the time of day.

● Lord Ashcroft is a businessman, philanthropist, author and pollster. His research is at [LordAshcroftPolls.com](http://LordAshcroftPolls.com). X/ Facebook @LordAshcroft



# Trump ‘finally gets his big day in Parliament’



By **ANNA MIKHAILOVA**  
DEPUTY POLITICAL EDITOR

DONALD Trump is set to address Parliament for the first time as part of a historic state visit. Prime Minister Sir Keir Starmer will hand over an invitation from the King when he meets the US President in Washington this week. This is expected to involve Mr Trump formally addressing MPs and Lords – during his last state visit he had been controversially blocked by former speaker John Bercow.

It would be part of an attempt to promote British interests and make clear to Mr Trump that the UK is his true ally. ‘Hopefully this would get better engagement for UK PLC,’ a senior source said. The three ‘keyholders’ of Westminster Hall, where foreign leaders usually address Parliament, are the Commons Speaker, the Lord Speaker and the Lord Great Chamberlain, who is represented by Black Rod.

All three have to agree for a visit to take place, after a request is made by the Government. In 2017 then-speaker Mr Bercow banned Mr Trump from addressing Parliament during his state visit.

At the time Theresa May welcomed the President, who heaped praise on the Queen during the state banquet in his honour. But Mr Bercow used his veto power to block a formal address to Parlia-

‘Why would you want to say no to him?’

ment based on Mr Trump’s migration policies. He told MPs such a visit was ‘not an automatic right, it is an earned honour’.

Senior sources confirmed to The Mail on Sunday that this time both the Lord Speaker and Commons Speaker would welcome a visit.

One source said: ‘Trump is the leader of the free world. He has just been elected with a large majority. Why would you want to say no?’

‘It will be interesting to see what he’s going to tell Parliament.’

The visit would involve an address to both Houses of Parliament, with MPs, Lords and senior staff invited.

Last night Mr Trump gave a wide-ranging speech at the Conservative Political Action Conference in Washington, touting the accomplishments of the first month of his presidency.

The PM will travel to Washington for talks with Mr Trump on Thurs-

## After first term snub, No 10 hopes a grand address to MPs could seal Special Relationship



ADDRESS: President Ronald Reagan speaks before Parliament in 1982

day. The two are scheduled to meet privately before posing together in the Oval Office and then holding a joint press conference. Sir Keir is expected to use the visit to announce the date by which he will boost spending on defence to 2.5 per cent of GDP, as well as reinforcing Britain’s commitment to supporting Ukraine – in an attempt to convince Mr Trump Europe is prepared to do more.

He will also formally invite Mr Trump to a state visit, which would make the President the first elected leader to receive the invitation twice in modern history.

The PM will be accompanied by Foreign Secretary David Lammy. US ambassador Lord Mandelson is also expected to attend.

Last night Sir Keir’s plans to offer a state visit were praised by politicians from both main parties. One senior Labour MP said: ‘It makes sense to offer a state visit. The Prime Minister needs to make clear he is not going to shift his position on Ukraine and the Russian invasion.’

‘He can be firm on that while still being friendly – you have to do both things at once. He needs to be clear on what our values are, and say to Trump, we are your friends, instead of shouting at him.’

The MP added the visit ‘is really fraught’. ‘The question is, who is he going to pay attention to? We want that to be us.’

the Lords and Commons Speakers. But last night sources close to both Speakers said a repeat of Mr Bercow’s ban would not happen. Former Tory veterans minister Tobias Ellwood, who attended Mr Trump’s inauguration, welcomed the state visit plans and said the Royal Family had to be involved, as it is ‘one of the most critical aspects of Britain that Trump respects and wants, that the United States doesn’t have’.

He added: ‘If we’re going to have any form of leverage, we need to be deploying it, 100 per cent.’

Any opportunity to improve backchannels, get your message across, to nudge the White House to think differently, should absolutely be leveraged at every opportunity. We need to persuade it is in America’s interests to have a strong Europe. That is better done through state visits, through backchannels.’

Mr Ellwood, a fellow of the Atlantic Council think tank, added: ‘We mustn’t get distracted by the frenzy of commentary, or spooked by dramatic rhetoric. We want to keep America close.’

But some MPs warned talk of a state visit would be an unwelcome distraction from the big issues.

Labour MP Alex Sobel said: ‘Keir Starmer has rightly said the UK Government stands “ready and willing” to act to guarantee the security of Ukraine as part of international efforts to get a lasting peace.’

‘Tomorrow it is three years since Russia invaded Ukraine and attempted to capture Kyiv and overthrow the democratically elected government. All our efforts should be focused on a fair, just and lasting peace for the Ukrainian peoples.’

Sources close to Mr Trump say they expect Thursday’s meeting will be ‘courteous and productive’ despite tensions over Ukraine.

‘The President has always valued the unique relationship between America and Britain, longtime allies and friends. But he will continue to put the interests of America first,’ the sources added.

As well as Westminster Hall, addresses by foreign leaders can also take place in the Royal Gallery or Robing Room, depending on the size of the crowd. Mr Reagan addressed Parliament in the Royal Gallery after Labour’s Michael Foot stopped him using Westminster Hall.

Additional reporting by Caroline Graham



ON FORM: Donald Trump during a speech in



## ...and he’ll ask William to come over to White House

By **Caroline Graham**

U.S. EDITOR

PRESIDENT TRUMP is expected to officially invite Prince William to visit Washington when he meets Sir Keir Starmer later this week, The Mail on Sunday can reveal.

The President is said to have been ‘wowed’ by the Prince of Wales when the pair met in December at the official reopening of Notre Dame cathedral in Paris.

Sources close to Mr Trump said they ‘got on like a house on fire’ and the President invited the first-in-line to the throne to visit the White House, but protocol dictates that any official visit is arranged through political channels.

A source said: ‘President Trump very much enjoyed meeting Prince William in France.’

‘He was wowed by William and thinks he’s a great guy. He will officially invite both the Prince and Princess of Wales to visit



‘WOWED’: Donald Trump meeting the Prince of Wales at Notre Dame

Washington, but understands if the Princess of Wales’ health issues prevent her from coming.’

After they met in Paris, Mr

Trump called William ‘a good-looking guy’, adding: ‘He looked really very handsome.’

‘Some people look better in per-

son. He looked great... he looked really nice and I told him that. We had a great talk.’

Mr Trump has vowed to visit the UK again during his second term as President.

During his first state visit in 2018 he famously broke Royal protocol by walking in front of the late Queen Elizabeth.

Trump is a self-professed Anglo-ophile who travels on Air Force One with a glossy coffee table book containing photographs of the 2018 trip.

His mother, Mary MacLeod, was born on the Isle of Lewis in the Hebrides in 1912.

## Poll: Britons doubt Starmer will win over the President

By **Glen Owen**

POLITICAL EDITOR

LESS than one in five voters think Sir Keir Starmer will be able to build a relationship with Donald Trump on the back of their meeting at the White House this week.

Exclusive polling data, published after the special relationship was rocked by the President’s wild attack on Volodymyr Zelensky, reveals just 19 per cent of those surveyed think the two leaders will hit it off.

Mr Trump called the Ukrainian president a ‘dictator’ and said he needed to ‘move fast or he is not going to have a country left’.

The research, conducted by former Conservative deputy chairman Lord Ashcroft, expects the Remain-supporting PM to have more luck with the European Union. Sir Keir is set to agree to food safety rules outlined by Brussels as part of his Brexit ‘reset’.

Some 32 per cent of respondents believe that he will establish a good relationship with the EU, but half (49 per cent) expect him to fail on both fronts.

But Sir Keir did beat Mr Trump’s friend Nigel Farage when voters were asked to rate the prime ministerial qualities of party leaders.

The PM leads the polling on 30 per cent, which puts him 7 points ahead of the Reform leader and way ahead of the Tories’ Kemi Badenoch on just 9 per cent.

A majority of voters (54 per cent) do not want to see Mr Farage in Government, while 33 per cent do. Some 18 per cent would like to see him in Downing Street.

If Mr Farage’s Reform UK forms a pact with the Tories, 39 per cent of respondents expect the Tories to be dominant, while 18 per cent anticipate Mr Farage calling the shots.

Voters are sceptical about whether Sir Keir has ‘a plan for Government’ – or is just busking it. A total of 64 per cent think the PM either doesn’t have a plan, or has the wrong one. Just one in seven say they are happy with the

### DO YOU TRUST THE PRIME MINISTER TO ESTABLISH A GOOD RELATIONSHIP:

With Trump	19%
With the EU	32%
With neither	49%

### DOES SIR KEIR STARMER HAVE A PLAN FOR GOVERNMENT?

No	39%
Yes, but it’s wrong	25%
Yes, and it’s a good one	20%

### BEST PM

Starmer	30%
Farage	23%
Badenoch	9%

### YOUR VIEW OF NIGEL FARAGE:

Should be PM	18%
Should have big Government job but not PM	15%
Should not be in Government	54%

### HOW WOULD A PACT WORK?

Tories dominant	39%
Reform dominant	18%
Equal partners	11%

EXCLUDES ‘DON’T KNOWS’

Government so far, including three in ten who voted for it.

●5,099 people were interviewed between February 13-17.

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