

## POLL EXCLUSIVE

# If Starmer were a teacher, say fed-up voters, his chosen subject would be something vague and indistinct that doesn't make a jot of difference

**A**S THE summer subsides and the back-to-school mood takes over, Keir Starmer must be wondering what happened to the holidays. Intensive Ukraine diplomacy followed weeks of protests at migrant hotels – culminating, with Tuesday's Epping court judgment, in the unravelling of the Government's asylum policy.

Meanwhile, Rachel Reeves is very publicly casting round for ways to extract yet more money from hard-pressed taxpayers in her autumn Budget.

If anyone needs the fresh start a new season can bring, it is Starmer and his beleaguered party. My poll finds a huge majority of voters saying they are pessimistic for the future of the country, including nearly two thirds of those who backed Labour last year.

The party's already underwhelming lead on economic management has narrowed dramatically as inflation creeps back up and extra taxes and regulations hurt jobs and growth.

Only half of last year's Labour voters think this Government is any better than the last one, and people are as likely as not to think

**‘PM seems incapable of using his 174 majority to do anything useful’**

Starmer will be gone by this time next year – an extraordinary position for a PM who walked into No 10 only last July with a majority of 174.

Voters increasingly complain that Starmer seems incapable of using that majority to do anything useful. Asked what subject he would teach if he were in the classroom, participants in my latest focus groups said ‘something vague and indistinct that doesn't really make a difference’.

His challenge for the new term, then, is to demonstrate some grip on the problems that he was all too ready to identify in opposition.

Otherwise, he faces a mirror image of the electoral dynamic that did for the Tories, with Labour's vote splintering in two or more directions – either to Reform UK or to Left-wing options such as the Lib Dems, the Greens and the as-yet-unnamed Corbynista alternative.

But so far, instead of displaying the sense of mission that a party needs to galvanise its base and keep waverers on board, Starmer has cultivated an unhappy knack for displeasing most of the people most of the time.

On winter fuel cuts and welfare reform he caved in to backbench pressure, earning both derision for the U-turn and fury for having proposed them in the first place.

He has imposed tens of billions in extra taxes with no discernible improvement in public services (‘Where are they spending the money? Where's it all going?’ demanded another of our participants last week – a 2024 Labour voter, as it happens).

He has even pulled off the same trick with his pledge to recognise a Palestinian state – horrifying some by rewarding Hamas terrorists and hostage-takers while at the same time failing to impress British Muslims, many of

whom see the move as a cynical ploy to secure their votes.

Nowhere has this ineffectualness been more damaging than in the field of immigration. Here Starmer has somehow contrived to get himself accused by the Left of invoking Enoch Powell while presiding over record levels of illegal migration. The news that small-boat arrivals have passed 50,000 since Labour took office has helped make the issue people's top priority: half of all voters name it among their top three con-

cerns, ahead of the cost of living and the NHS.

In my research, many (again, including many Labour voters) saw the migrant hotel protests not just as a reaction to crimes allegedly committed by some of their residents, but as the inevitable result of ignoring ordinary people for too long: ‘You've got people who can't afford a house, and these people come across the Channel illegally and they're being put in four-star hotels and given money, and they wonder why people are

upset about it,’ as another participant put it. What infuriates them further is the suggestion that protesters are simply far-Right troublemakers. This, as much as the issue itself, is what makes the broken asylum system such an open goal for Nigel Farage.

When it comes to Reform UK there are three kinds of people. The biggest single chunk (though a minority overall) thinks the party is a bad influence and wishes it would go away. Another slice likes what Reform stands for and might well vote for it.

In the middle – around one in five of all voters – are those who currently wouldn't vote Reform but are glad it exists because it says things that need saying. These people think Reform serves the useful purpose of keeping pressure on the established parties to deal with issues they would rather ignore. They also – if Farage plays his cards right – represent the next round of potential converts to his voting coalition.

What Reform supporters like best about the party, they say, is that it puts Britain first and stands up for common sense and free speech. Nine in ten of them name immigration among their top

**‘What Reform supporters like is that their party puts Britain first’**

concerns. They are more committed to their party than their Tory and Labour counterparts.

What, then, stops the ‘glad they're around’ group from going all-in for Reform? The single biggest factor, I found, is doubt that they are ready to run the country. Much as these voters care about immigration, they are not sure how Reform would handle public services and the economy. They wonder if their policies really add up. They think Farage lacks an experienced team (‘Who would be his chancellor? Who would be his foreign secretary?’ as one participant asked). And there are lingering worries that racist elements cling to the party.

These are the challenges that face Farage as he prepares for the Reform conference next month, the first of the new political season. Compared to Labour (who have to show that they have a purpose), the Conservatives (who have to show that they're relevant) and the Liberal Democrats (who have to remind people that they exist at all), working out how to extend his party's lead in the polls is a nice problem for him to have.

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



By LORD ASHCROFT

**‘He has cultivated an unhappy knack for displeasing most of the people most of the time’**

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'Certainly, Sir. I'll tell the chef. That's 36 fish and chips, 23 hamburgers, no onions, 44 sausage and mash, 16...'

## Hire that hints at Wes's bid for top job

By **Brendan Carlin**

WES Streeting has hired Barack Obama's former speechwriter as speculation mounts about the battle to succeed Sir Keir Starmer.

Michael Lea Rock, who was also chief speechwriter to both Gordon Brown and David Cameron in Downing Street, has been recruited to do a similar job for the Health Secretary.

Sources close to Mr Streeting insisted last night that the appointment was a 'civil service one' – not a personal political hiring by Mr Streeting. But the move comes after The Mail on Sunday reported this year on claims that the Health Secretary's allies had already established a loyal 'network' across No10 and government departments.

It also comes amid mounting speculation that a future Labour leadership contest will come down to a battle between Mr Streeting and Deputy Prime Minister Angela Rayner.

# Voters urge PM to axe Reeves – because she's not up to it

By **Glen Owen**

POLITICAL EDITOR

SIR Keir Starmer should sack Rachel Reeves as Chancellor because she is not up to the job, an exclusive poll of voters has found.

A total of 43 per cent think Ms Reeves should be removed from the Treasury, while just 19 per cent think she should stay in post to deliver the autumn Budget – when she is expected to hike taxes again to fill a widening black hole in the economy.

The research, by former Con-

## 'Strong support for Jenrick on migration'

servative deputy chairman Lord Ashcroft, found that even many Labour voters – more than one in five – want the Prime Minister to fire his Chancellor.

Business leaders and economists have warned that many firms are being pushed to the brink as they struggle to absorb higher National Insurance payments, with the costs being passed on to customers in the form of surging prices.

The poll also finds that nearly

## THE FUTURE LOOKS BLEAK, CHANCELLOR

### SHOULD THE PM SACK RACHEL REEVES?

Yes	43%
No	19%

### WAS ROBERT JENRICK RIGHT TO EXPRESS FEARS FOR HIS DAUGHTERS' SAFETY AMID HIGH MIGRATION?

Yes	55%
No	32%

### SHOULD UKRAINE ACCEPT RUSSIAN OCCUPATION AS PART OF A PEACE DEAL?

Yes	14%
No	52%



UNDER FIRE: Rachel Reeves with Sir Keir Starmer

### IS LABOUR BETTER OR WORSE THAN THE LAST TORY GOVERNMENT?

Better	23%
Worse	39%

### WILL KEIR STARMER STILL BE LABOUR LEADER IN A YEAR'S TIME?

Yes	35%
No	34%

### WILL KEMI BADENOCH STILL BE TORY LEADER IN A YEAR'S TIME?

Yes	20%
No	38%

### WILL NIGEL FARAGE STILL BE REFORM LEADER IN A YEAR'S TIME?

Yes	59%
No	9%

four in ten voters, 39 per cent, think Sir Keir's Government is doing worse than the last Tory government, while only 23 per cent think that it is doing better.

They are split on whether Sir Keir will still be in No10 in a year's time, with 35 per cent thinking that he will and 34 per cent that he will have been replaced or quit.

The figures are even worse for Tory leader Kemi Badenoch, with only 20 per cent expecting her to be leader in a year.

A whopping 59 per cent think

Nigel Farage will still be leader of Reform UK.

Shadow Justice Secretary Robert Jenrick receives strong support for his Mail on Sunday article this month, in which he said high migration made him fear for his daughters' safety – 55 per cent say it was legitimate for him to say he didn't want his children 'to share a neighbourhood with men from backward countries who broke into Britain illegally and about whom we know next to nothing'.

Amid ongoing diplomatic efforts to strike a peace deal in Ukraine, Lord Ashcroft found that only 14 per cent think that Kyiv should accept Russian occupation as part of a peace deal; a total of 52 per cent do not.

The peer writes in today's MoS: 'My poll finds a huge majority of voters saying they are pessimistic for the future of the country, including nearly two thirds of those who backed Labour last year. 'Only half of last year's Labour voters think this Government is any better than the last one, and people are as likely as not to think Starmer will be gone by this time next year – an extraordinary position for a PM who walked into No10 only last July with a majority of 174.'

Lord Ashcroft: Page 30