# Peter Mandelson warns Reform UK surge signals voter anger but not prime ministerial rise



Peter Mandelson has dismissed the notion of Nigel Farage ascending to the role of Prime Minister, even as his party has made notable strides in local elections. At a recent event in Washington, the UK’s ambassador to the US recognised Farage’s growing popularity as symptomatic of escalating voter dissatisfaction, particularly concerning Labour’s failure to deliver meaningful change since assuming power. “I’m not sure [the recent success] translates into people imagining that he’s going to be prime minister,” Mandelson stated, although he acknowledged a “strong, popular vote” for Farage that should not be underestimated.

The local elections revealed a significant shift in the political landscape, with Reform UK securing hundreds of council seats. Recent polling data indicates Labour has dipped to 23%, while Reform has surged to 28%, creating shockwaves throughout Westminster. This decline in Labour’s fortunes mirrors the early challenges the party faced after its 1997 landslide victory, with Mandelson himself noting that voters can quickly become impatient, demanding immediate transformative change that has not materialised under the new government.

Mandelson, a key figure from the era of New Labour, emphasised how today's political volatility starkly contrasts with the relative stability of the late 1990s. “We didn't have the same volatility of nationalism and populism that exists," he remarked, pointing out that Farage's influence was virtually absent back then. He suggested that the current turbulence can be attributed to global pressures and the swift impacts of rapid globalisation, painting a concerning picture for conventional political frameworks.

Originally emerging as the Brexit Party in 2018, Reform UK has established itself as a formidable force within British politics, unwavering in its right-wing stance. The party's platform focuses on strict immigration control and a clear rejection of net-zero targets. By targeting disillusioned Conservative voters, they are pushing for significant changes, including a decisive break from the European Court of Human Rights. However, experts warn that limited local funding could thwart the realisation of these ambitious promises.

With Prime Minister Rishi Sunak’s announcement of a snap election on 4 July, Reform UK faces an unexpected test. This call for early elections has caught the party unprepared, revealing weaknesses in its campaign infrastructure. While Farage has chosen not to stand as a candidate, he remains an essential strategist for Reform UK, leaving uncertainties about the party’s ability to convert heightened discontent into electoral success. Polling reveals support estimates between 8% and 14%, yet the party grapples with significant organisational challenges, especially in distinguishing its message from the Conservatives amid ongoing leadership turmoil.

Despite Farage's previous failures to secure a parliamentary seat, his media visibility and leadership become crucial for the party's strategy. However, there is a real risk that Reform UK could inadvertently split the Conservative vote, facilitating another Labour ascent, especially as Keir Starmer focuses on enhancing the UK’s nuclear capabilities and defence initiatives in response to the shifting political landscape.

The current climate of political volatility underscores an urgent need for established parties to adapt and meaningfully address the growing disillusionment with governance. While Farage's rise signifies a substantial challenge for the current political leadership, the ability of traditional parties like Labour and the Conservatives to respond effectively will ultimately determine the trajectory of the UK’s political future.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

1. <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/farage-mandelson-reform-general-election-b2749794.html> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.ft.com/content/c3b25079-f394-4a40-84af-2c11fa0f6338> - Reform UK, led by Nigel Farage, achieved significant success in the 2025 local elections, gaining control of ten English councils and two metro mayor positions. The party's platform includes anti-immigration, anti-net zero, and anti-'woke' policies, advocating for leaving the European Court of Human Rights, offshoring the processing of illegal immigrants, stricter immigration rules, and revoking citizenship for foreign-born criminals. Economically, it supports a small-state model, cutting corporation taxes for SMEs, scrapping inheritance tax, and opposing expanded workers' rights. Despite these positions, experts warn that local funding constraints may limit the party's ability to implement its promises.
3. <https://www.reuters.com/world/uk/new-look-populist-reform-party-could-reshape-uk-political-landscape-2025-04-29/> - Reform UK, initially launched as the Brexit Party in 2018, has rapidly emerged as a significant force in British politics under the leadership of Nigel Farage. Following its strong performance in the last general election where it secured five parliamentary seats and the third-largest vote share, Reform has undertaken a substantial transformation to become more professional and appealing to a wider electorate. With growing popularity, particularly among disillusioned Conservative voters, Reform is poised to make major gains in upcoming local elections, potentially securing 400–450 council seats.
4. <https://www.ft.com/content/bb3a4052-17a3-4c3c-ab47-828808462c2e> - Reform UK is hastily gearing up for a national campaign after Prime Minister Rishi Sunak called a snap election for July 4, catching the party off guard as they had been preparing for an autumn election. Led by Richard Tice, Reform UK aims to impact the Conservatives' vote share despite being less financially robust than during the 2019 elections when they were the Brexit Party. Reform UK raised just over £250,000 in 2023 compared to £7.5 million pre-2019 election. Tice has supported the party with loans and donations, contributing significantly to their funds. Despite receiving backing from some donors, major supporters like Jeremy Hosking have shifted to other parties. The party is struggling with its campaign infrastructure and social media spending compared to the Conservatives. Additionally, Nigel Farage decided not to run as a candidate, further questioning the strength of their campaign. Despite polling at around 11%, experts predict challenges for Reform UK in converting dissatisfaction with the Tories into votes due to organizational weaknesses.
5. <https://www.lemonde.fr/en/international/article/2024/06/02/in-the-uk-nigel-farage-hopes-to-win-back-disappointed-conservatives_6673433_4.html> - The far-right Reform UK party, founded as the Brexit Party in 2018 and led by Richard Tice, is aiming to win over dissatisfied Conservative voters following PM Rishi Sunak's announcement of snap elections on July 4. Despite garnering between 8% and 14% in the polls, the party is running a controversial campaign with Nigel Farage, who is not standing for election but remains influential. Farage suggests addressing immigration by taxing employers for employing immigrants, claiming it would reduce legal immigration which he blames for wage stagnation. Farage's ambiguous stance on potential alliances with the Conservatives has caused confusion, but he aims to present Reform UK as a strong opposition against Labour's expected election win. Since Brexit, Farage has pivoted his focus towards migration and opposing the UK's climate commitments, while maintaining his media presence on GB News and appearances in entertainment. Reform UK's strategy hinges on appealing to Tory voters disillusioned by recent Conservative leadership trials and a desire for an alternative opposition force against Labour.
6. <https://apnews.com/article/7d8c7cdcd66b3ce4b7de67c6731a2431> - Nigel Farage has announced his decision to run for Parliament under the right-wing party Reform U.K., contesting the seat in Clacton-on-Sea in the upcoming July 4 election. This is his eighth attempt, having failed the previous seven times. His return signifies a challenge for Prime Minister Rishi Sunak and the Conservative Party, as Farage aims to lead the opposition against an anticipated Labour government. Farage, known for his anti-immigration stance and pro-Brexit views, also plans to lead Reform U.K., succeeding Richard Tice. Meanwhile, Labour Party leader Keir Starmer emphasizes his commitment to the U.K.'s nuclear deterrent and promises increased defense spending. Despite Reform U.K.'s slim chances of winning many seats, their presence might siphon conservative votes, potentially aiding Labour's win. The Conservative Party criticizes Farage, accusing him of aiding Labour by splitting the vote.
7. <https://www.ft.com/content/77efbabf-0c6a-4ba4-9046-fa8951770e4b> - Nigel Farage and his radical-right party, Reform UK, have seen substantial growth, prompting speculation about their potential to reshape British politics. Despite holding only five parliamentary seats and failing to attract 86% of the vote, their influence cannot be ignored. Farage's challenge is to convert his party from a fringe movement to a mainstream one, which includes overcoming internal conflicts and shedding toxic elements. While the Tories face the threat of losing votes to Farage, they must rebuild credibility and present themselves as a serious, broad-based party capable of governance. Labour must also address growth, reform, and immigration to prevent populist gains. Farage's rise is significant but not guaranteed. It depends on whether traditional parties can adapt and address voters' concerns credibly.