

Voters hungry for a revolutionary who will stop the small boats

Commentary



By James Frayne

Just before Christmas I ran a poll on Nigel Farage that produced startling findings: 43 per cent of those planning to vote Conservative at the next election – and a third of all voters and a quarter of all Labour voters – declare themselves open to voting for a party led by Farage.

Before Farage went into the jungle to film *I'm a Celebrity*, it was said his plan was to improve his standing with voters, partly by introducing himself to a younger audience. If so, it worked: half of my polling sample had seen him in the jungle (or seen coverage of it), and of this group, half said they viewed him more favourably on his return (and 56 per cent of those were planning to vote Conservative), with just 13 per cent saying they viewed him less favourably.

In this poll, given a list of words they might associate with Nigel Farage, the most commonly chosen by all voters were “intelligent” and “straightforward” (closely followed by “unpleasant” and “two-faced”). Conservatives were particularly likely to use these positive references.

While his personality appeals to many traditional Conservatives, we should not overlook the obvious: above all, they like him because they agree with him on policy – particularly

immigration. Seventy seven per cent of those planning to vote Conservative say they agree with his view that immigration is too high; 86 per cent of these Conservatives agree with his view that we need to stop the arrival of so many small boats.

While he has broader policy appeal – 77 per cent of Conservatives agree with him there is too much political correctness and wokeness and 69 per cent agree with him taxes are too high – Farage is really the candidate of low immigration. Given the Government’s terrible struggles with immigration policy, a significant chunk of those

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considering voting for a Farage-led party will surely do so in the end. Critically, in this election, Farage can present himself as the “change” candidate. His style and extreme clarity on controversial issues means he offers something different.

Nevertheless, in many ways, he is also a safe and boring choice. If Farage invigorates the Reform Party, the likely result would simply be all parties taking a tougher line on immigration.

While not nothing, this wouldn’t represent the scale of the change the public want. The conditions are ripe for a near-total replacement of the political class – with new parties, new candidates and new policies. I have

been running opinion research projects for 25 years, and I cannot remember a more disillusioned and angrier electorate. Their list of grievances is long: huge utility bills; expensive groceries; rising rents and mortgages; endless waits for GP appointments; decaying high streets; massive welfare bills; high taxes; unfathomable sentencing in courtrooms; and homelessness. And, of course, high levels of immigration, the endless arrival of small boats, and the housing of refugees and asylum seekers in apparently smart hotels.

People are completely ready to vote for revolutionary change and there is a massive gap in the market for someone to create a movement or party that would detonate a metaphorical bomb in the system. Yes, such a party would, like a Farage-led Reform Party, pledge to stop the boats and drastically cut immigration. But its revolutionary stance would be much broader.

It would pledge to tackle perceived corporate profiteering and ludicrously high executive salaries; it would reform and toughen-up sentencing; it would build more homes and more roads; it would demand greater conditionality in the welfare system and introduce a contributory element; it would slash taxes and rents for small shops. And all this for a start.

Farage could well be poised to disrupt this election in a big way. But the public is ready for something far, far more revolutionary than him.

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