

UK, US and Global Politics

Why has Keir Starmer been forced to 'u-turn' by his own party?

Keir Starmer is both Prime Minister and Leader of the Labour Party. Last week, he had to try to balance these two roles. On one hand, he was connecting with international leaders at a meeting of NATO members, while at home, he was trying to manage some of his own MPs who are unhappy with his plans.



A new law about welfare payments is due to be voted on by Parliament next week and many Labour MPs had said they may vote against it, even though it is put forward by their own party.

When Labour won the General Election last year, they did so with a majority in the House of Commons - meaning they have more MPs than all the other parties combined. In theory, this should make it easy for Keir Starmer to pass laws. Usually, MPs from the same party vote in the same way. They are managed by **whips** whose job it is to ensure the party votes the way the leader wants. Most MPs are **backbenchers**. This means they are just ordinary MPs and do not work for the government. However, last week, Keir Starmer faced a **backbench revolt**. The new law, called the *Welfare Reform and Fairness Bill*, would make changes to how much people can claim in benefits. The aim is to save billions of pounds.

But last week more than 100 Labour MPs indicated that they might vote against the plans as they fear for the impact it will have on some of their constituents. After trying and failing to persuade them to vote the way he wants, Keir Starmer performed a *u-turn* and changed the parts of his plans his backbench MPs did not like. Prime Ministers hate having to perform *u-turns* because it makes them look weak. This is because:

- It suggests they didn't plan properly in the first place.
- They have given in to pressure from others, rather than doing what they think is right.
- It looks like they don't keep their promises.

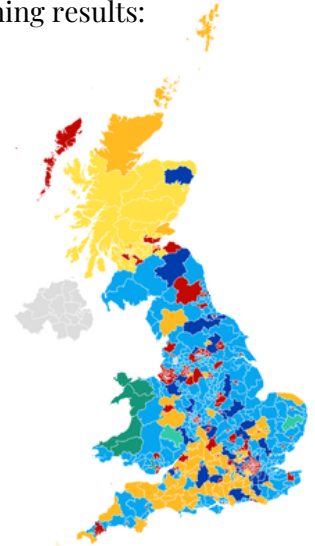
This is not the first *u-turn* Keir Starmer has made. It is a good reminder that whilst Prime Ministers have to manage the country, they also have to carefully manage their own political party too.

Why is a recent poll so significant?

Between elections regular **polling** takes place of people in Britain. This means that people are asked questions so that politicians can understand how people in Britain think about things. One of the most common polls is to ask how people would vote at the next election. This then enables pollsters to predict what would happen if a General Election were to take place today.

Recently, a special MRP poll took place. Rather than just looking at national opinion, it looks at opinion on a local level, meaning it is more likely to be accurate.

Last week YouGov produced its first MRP poll since the General Election and it had astonishing results:



The poll indicates that if an election were held now, Nigel Farage's Reform UK would be the biggest party with 271/650 seats in Parliament. This would be the first time since 1906 that neither Labour nor the conservatives have won the election. Polls are not always entirely accurate and are sometimes more a sign of people's frustration. The results on this poll will, however, have people in the Labour and Conservative parties questioning what more they need to do to please voters.

Discussion Points

- Why might it be difficult to lead the country and a political party at the same time?
- Why is it important for Prime Ministers to keep their party united?
- Why is it important for politicians to know what people think?

Key Definitions

Whips - MPs who are responsible for making sure their party's MPs vote the way the leader wants.

Backbenchers - Ordinary MPs who do not have another job in the government. They sit at the back of the House of Commons.

Backbench Revolt - A situation when backbench MPs may come together to resist something the party leader wants.

Polling - Asking people what they think about something in order to understand national opinion.

Pollsters - People or companies that run polls.