

"A reflection of Keir Starmer's first 150 (or so) days in power"

Daniel Williams

When Keir Starmer paraded into Downing Street on the 5th July 2024 to take his place as the first Labour Prime Minister since 2010, it was a historic change for Britain. This new Labour Party had risen from the ashes of a dismal election defeat in 2019 to secure a 174-seat majority, one of the largest the House of Commons has seen in modern times. With this great mandate came a great responsibility for the party, fixing the “mess” the Conservative Party had created over its 14 years in government. So, how has this task gone for Keir Starmer during his first 150 (or so) days in power?

Immediately after entering Downing Street the Prime Minister was quick to appoint allies who had been key players in his shadow cabinet to ministerial positions. Within the first days of the Starmer administration cabinet ministers found out that the state had been left in a worse situation than they had anticipated.

This was demonstrated in the revelation by the Chancellor, Rachel Reeves, that the previous Conservative government had left a “£22 billion black hole” in the nation's finances. The Health Secretary, Wes Streeting, also revealed that the NHS was in a poor state due to it being “broken” by his predecessors. The new government had to act controversially early on in its tenure due to these revelations and refused to scrap the two-child benefit cap. According to the Chancellor, this scheme would cost £2.5 billion and therefore it could not be pledged to the public without knowing where the money is “going to come from”.

As well as this, Starmer's government scrapped winter fuel allowance for 10 million pensioners. This move was seen by some as insensitive towards pensioners who truly need the benefit to get through the winter. Following these controversial decisions, Starmer began to lose popularity amongst the public.

However, this controversy reached its pinnacle when the first Labour budget was announced on the 30th October.

The budget aimed to raise £40 billion in tax to try and fix the “black hole” left by the last government. This forced the Chancellor to raise National Insurance for employers, make farmers subject to inheritance tax in a way that they previously were not and increase capital gains tax. The increase on National Insurance for employers was controversial as it poses a definite risk to employment levels as employment is now more expensive for employers. Farmers took to the budget extremely negatively and staged demonstrations in

Westminster because of it. This was an embarrassing look for Starmer. Increasing capital gains tax raises more money for the government during the transaction of shares at the expense of the retail investor, who could be investing for their future.

However, Starmer gained some credibility from the public for fulfilling the manifesto pledge of not increasing VAT or income tax.

Nevertheless, the overall reaction from the British people to the government's budget was incredibly negative.

Following the budget, Kemi Badenoch was elected the new leader of the Conservative Party. This cemented who Starmer's main opponent and critic in Parliament would be during debates such as Prime Minister's Questions.

Keir Starmer faced his first cabinet resignation on the 28th November, when the Secretary of State for Transport, Louise Haigh, resigned over pleading guilty to a criminal charge in 2014. This called into question the Prime Minister's integrity around his appointments to cabinet, when it came to light that he was aware of Haigh's legal conduct.

Overall, Keir Starmer's first 150 days (or so) in power have been controversial. This is because of allegations of broken promises over the budget and questions over Starmer's integrity with his appointments. These events have led to a significant drop to Labour's support in the opinion polls, with some even placing the Conservative's and Reform UK above Labour.

This decline in Starmer's popularity forces the question of whether the political volatility of the previous three elections will continue as Starmer tries to gain back trust before he bids for a second term in 2029.