Persuasion UK

What messages are Reform vulnerable to?

Published July 2025

Research questions

- A wide body of research exists on the brand weaknesses of established UK political parties. But as a new party, none really exists for Reform UK.

- Previous Persuasion UK research explored the reasons people might leave other parties – especially Labour – and vote for Reform.

- The purpose of this research, by contrast, is to explore the opposite. That is, what messages or communication strategies might Reform be vulnerable to if they are used by the party's opponents?

Methodology

- We invited a large group of voters into a polling experiment, and split them into 6 groups – 5 message groups and 1 control group. Each message group sees just one Reform related counter message, control see nothing.

- After they've seen the message, all groups take the same survey – covering their voting intent, preferences for Prime Minister and a variety of attitudes related to political parties.

- In analysis we see which message group ends up with the largest differences, if any, vs control – provided it's statistically significant, we can attribute this persuasion effect to the message they've seen.

- In order to properly test statistical significance of effects, linear regression was used. Threshold set at 90% (p-value <0.10).

- The sample here was nationally representative, n=1000 in each treatment and control, n=6000 in total. Conducted in May 2025.

Outcome metrics

- Issue salience, % choosing these issues as top 3 issues:

  - Health
  - Immigration
  - Environment and climate change

- % of people putting themselves at >5/10 willing to vote Reform

- % saying they intend to vote Reform at the next general election

- % choosing Farage as best Prime Minister in a four way contest with Keir Starmer, Ed Davey and Kemi Badenoch

- % choosing Farage as best Prime Minister in a two way contest with Keir Starmer

- Nigel Farage favourability ratings (net score)

- Reform UK favourability ratings (net score)

- % agreeing with the statement "Reform UK are fighting to improve the issues that matter to me"

Treatment 1 - deportation video

Below is some news footage concerning the Labour government's efforts to deport asylum seekers from the UK. Please watch it carefully.

[Respondents saw first 53 seconds of this video - https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cuUb_TpTfkA]

Treatment 2 – climate change denial

Below is a short video from a Sky News article titled: *'Categorically wrong': Scientists condemn comments by Reform's Richard Tice that man-made climate change is 'garbage'. Please watch this video carefully.*

[respondents saw first 43 seconds of video on this page:
https://news.sky.com/story/reform-uks-richard-tice-dismisses-man-made-climate-change-as-garbage-13311385]

In response to the comments in this video, Dr George Adamson from King's College London said the idea that Richard Tice had "discovered something that climate scientists don't know about is of course preposterous".

'Categorically wrong': Scientists condemn comments by Reform's Richard Tice that man-made climate change is 'garbage'

Richard Tice also said the scientists who agreed with him were "not a minority", though his view is contrary to major consensus.

Victoria Seabrook
Climate reporter @SeabrookClimate

Monday 17 February 2025 15:35, UK

3:14

'Man-made climate change is garbage'

Treatment 3 - NHS attack

Below is a video released by the Labour party concerning Reform UK and Nigel Farage and their policy on the NHS. Please watch it carefully.

[respondents both this tweet and the video: https://x.com/UKLabour/status/1883514970840707541]

Treatment 4 – corporate interests (text)

Below is an argument that someone recently made about Reform UK and Nigel Farage. Please read it carefully.

"Nigel Farage says he's on people's side—but when you take a closer look it's pretty clear who he's really fighting for isn't it? It's the rich, the powerful, his mates in big business.

You read that Reform has taken over £2 million from fossil fuel lobbyists, polluters, and climate change deniers—over 90% of their donations come from there apparently. £2 million quid! That's not standing up for the people, it's selling out to the highest bidder.

That is why he wants to cut public services, cut workers rights, cut taxes for the richest - handing even more power to the elites he pretends to oppose. Just like his mate Donald Trump is doing.

He's not smashing the system. He and his rich friends basically are the system."

Treatment 5 – Trump puppet (text)

Below is an argument that someone recently made about Reform UK and Nigel Farage. Please read it carefully.

"We have already seen the chaos that Donald Trump has caused in the United States. But here in the UK we already have our own mini-version of Trump: Nigel Farage.

He is Trump's big mate, palling around with him at every opportunity – even if it means abandoning his constituents to go to Trump rallies.

You can see why they are friends, they share the same views on everything.

Just like Trump, Farage wants to cut public services people depend on.

Just like Trump, he wants to back Putin instead of Ukraine.

And just like Trump, he wants to sow division and hatred of other people.

The polls show Farage might be our next Prime Minister – all he would do is turn the UK over to Trump, Musk and their mates. He needs to be stopped."
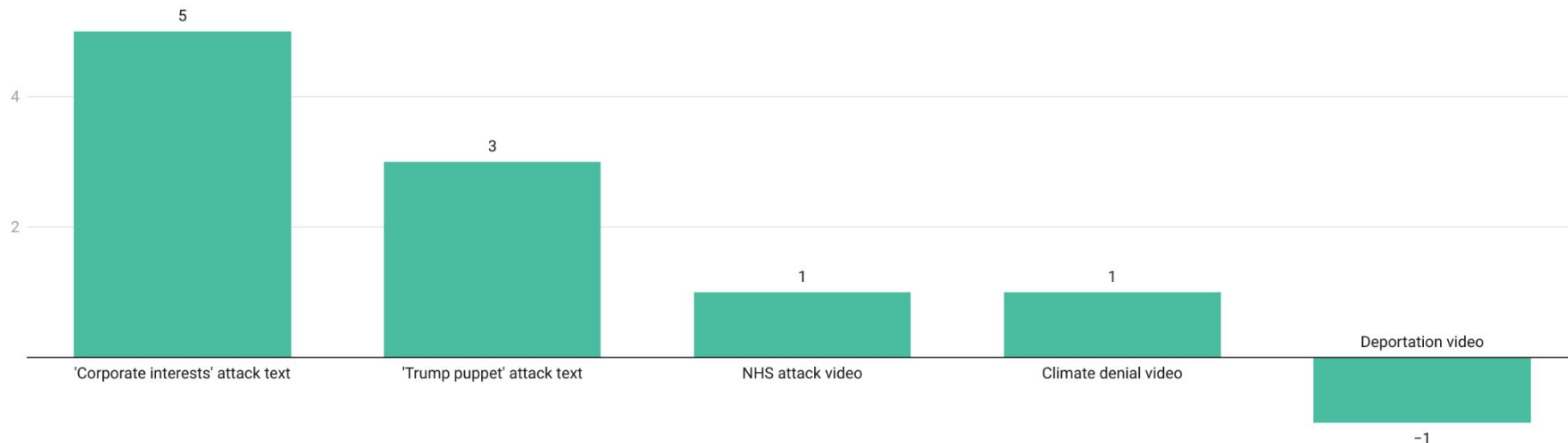
CONTROL

[NO MESSAGE]

Score of statistically significant (90% confidence) persuasion effects in a progressive direction, highest possible score = +10, lowest possible score -10

1 point for statistically significant persuasion effect in a progressive direction, minus 1 for any unintended persuasion effect in non-progressive direction
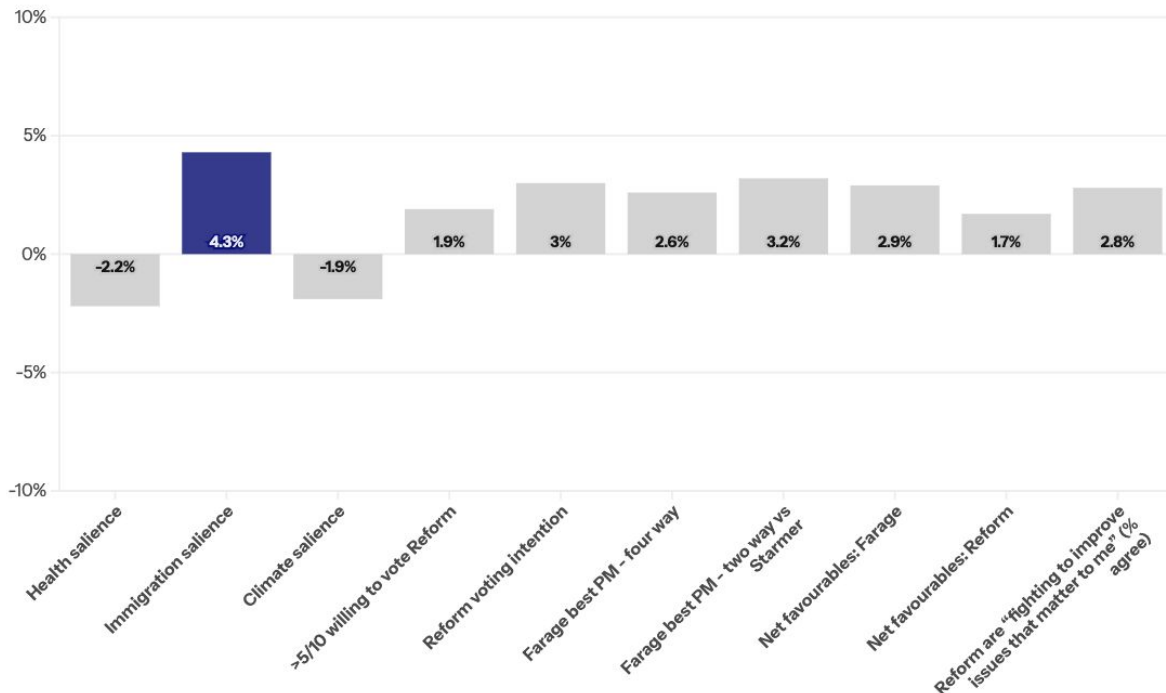
Deportation video - changes vs control

The only statistically significant effect this message achieved was to spike the salience of immigration (the % choosing immigration as a top 3 issue). There is some evidence of wider pro-Reform effects but these fall just under the threshold of statistical significance.

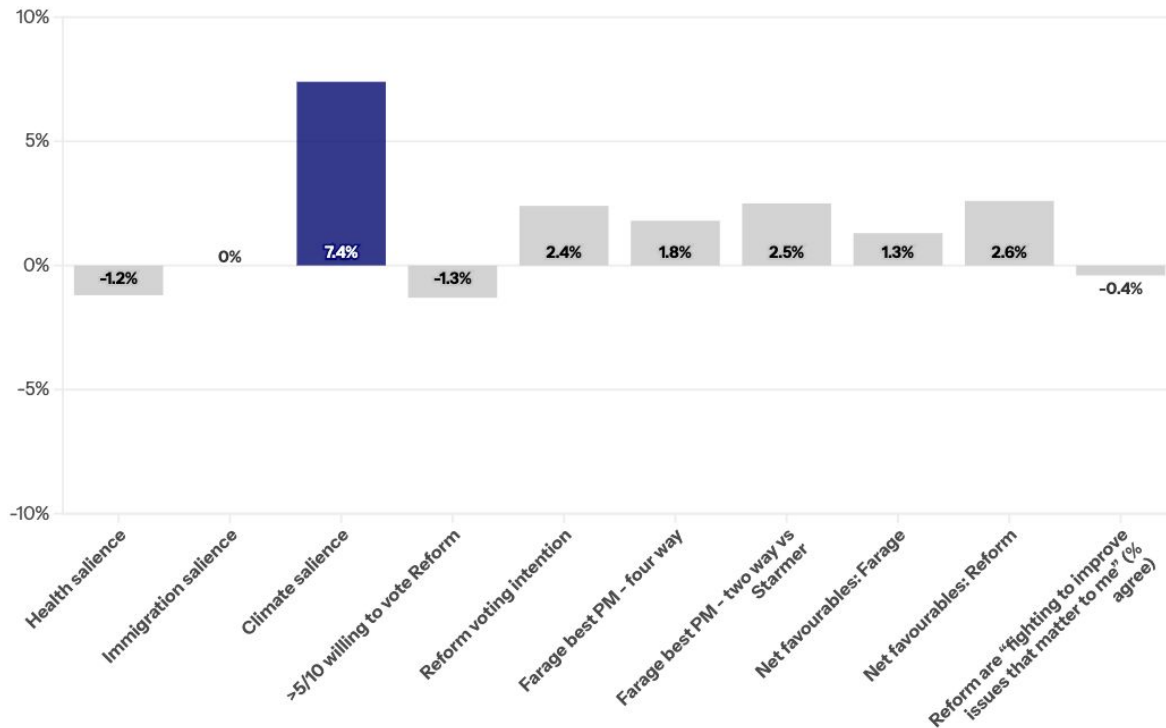*Blue = statistically significant effect. Grey = not statistically significant.*

Persuasion UK

Climate denial video – changes vs control

This video spiked the salience of climate – but did not do much else

Blue = statistically significant effect. Grey = not statistically significant.

Persuasion UK

NHS attack video - changes vs control

This video spiked the salience of health - but did not do much else

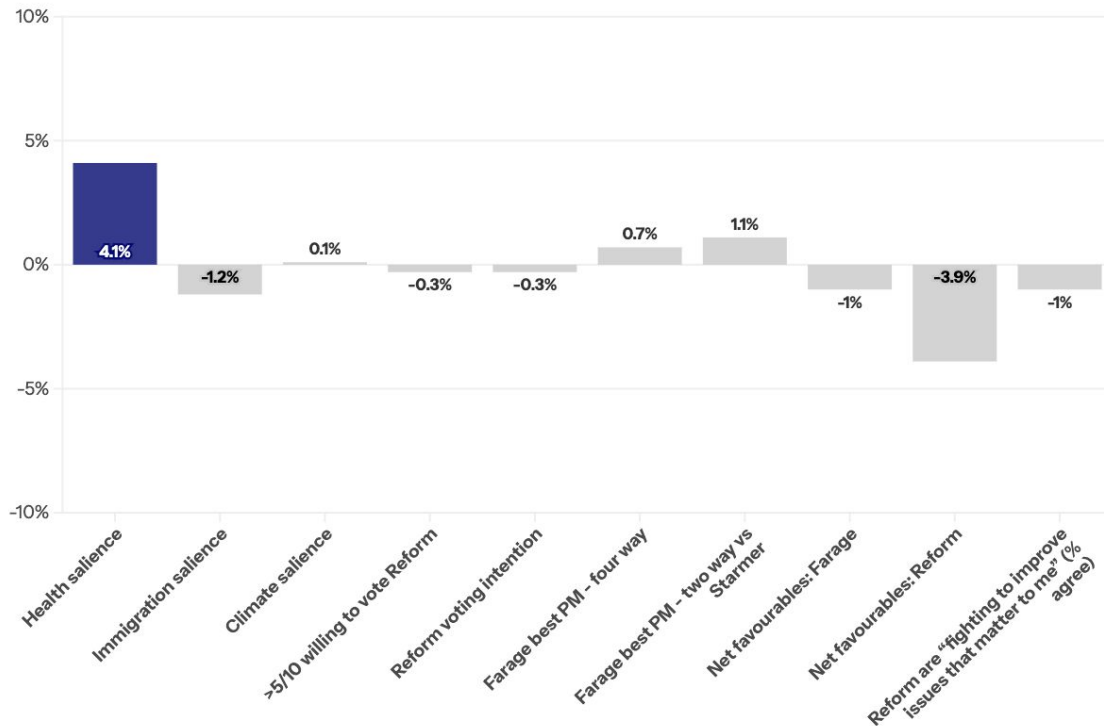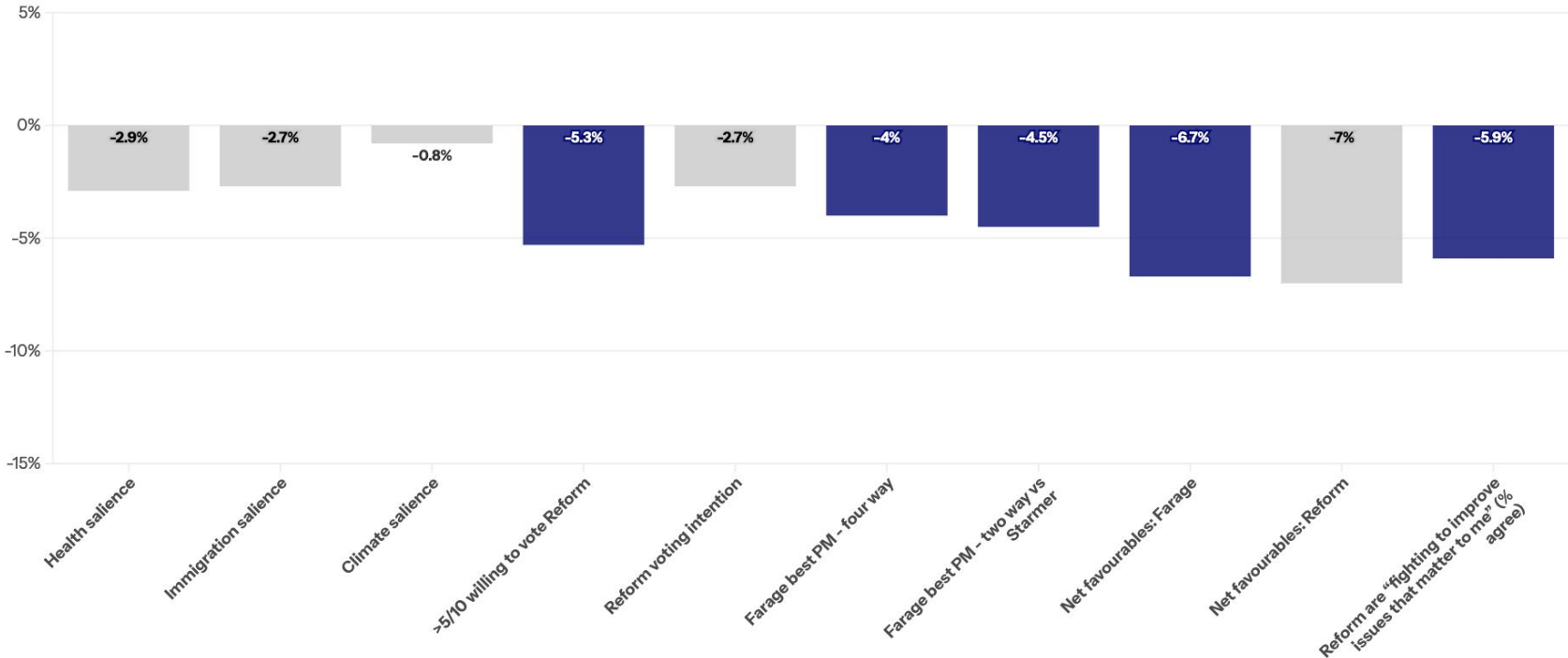*Blue = statistically significant effect. Grey = not statistically significant.*

Bar chart showing changes vs control:
- Health salience: 4.1% (blue)
- Immigration salience: -1.2%
- Climate salience: 0.1%
- >5/10 willing to vote Reform: -0.3%
- Reform voting intention: -0.3%
- Farage best PM – four way: 0.7%
- Farage best PM – two way vs Starmer: 1.1%
- Net favourables: Farage: -1%
- Net favourables: Reform: -3.9%
- Reform are "fighting to improve issues that matter to me" (% agree): -1%

Persuasion UK

Corporate interests attack text - changes vs control

This message achieved several significant effects, decreasing willingness to vote Reform and the belief that Reform are 'fighting on issues that matter to me'. It also decreases favourability to Farage as well as the percentage of voters choosing him as the best choice for Prime Minister.

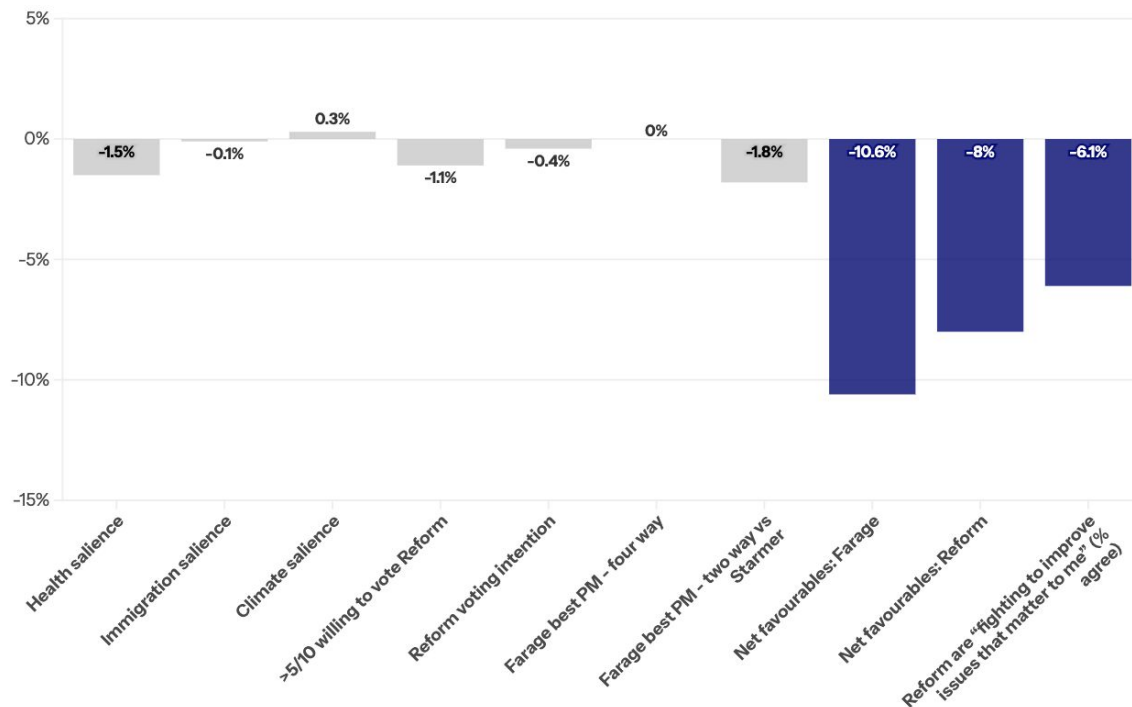*Blue = statistically significant effect. Grey = not statistically significant.*

Persuasion UK

Trump puppet attack text – changes vs control

This message drives down Farage and Reform's favourables, as well as the belief that Reform are fighting 'on issues that matter to me'.

Blue = statistically significant effect. Grey = not statistically significant.

Bar chart values:
- Health salience: -1.5%
- Immigration salience: -0.1%
- Climate salience: 0.3%
- >5/10 willing to vote Reform: -1.1%
- Reform voting intention: -0.4%
- Farage best PM – four way: 0%
- Farage best PM – two way vs Starmer: -1.8%
- Net favourables: Farage: -10.6%
- Net favourables: Reform: -8%
- Reform are "fighting to improve issues that matter to me" (% agree): -6.1%

Persuasion UK

Summary of persuasion effects, Reform related message testing: change vs control on 10 key metrics

Green = a persuasion effect in a progressive direction that we know is statistically significant (to 90% confidence). Red = statistically significant persuasion effect in a non-progressive direction.

	Deportation video	Climate denial video	NHS attack video	'Corporate interests' attack text	'Trump puppet' attack text
Health salience	−2.2%	−1.2%	+4.1%	−2.9%	−1.5%
Immigration salience	+4.3%	±0.0%	−1.2%	−2.7%	−0.1%
Climate salience	−1.9%	+7.4%	+0.1%	−0.8%	+0.3%
>5/10 willing to vote Reform	+1.9%	−1.3%	−0.3%	−5.3%	−1.1%
Reform voting intention	+3.0%	+2.4%	−0.3%	−2.7%	−0.4%
Farage best PM - four way	+2.6%	+1.8%	+0.7%	−4.0%	±0.0%
Farage best PM - two way vs Starmer	+3.2%	+2.5%	+1.1%	−4.5%	−1.8%
Net favourables: Farage	+2.9%	+1.3%	−1.0%	−6.7%	−10.6%
Net favourables: Reform	+1.7%	+2.6%	−3.9%	−7.0%	−8.0%
Reform are "fighting to improve issues that matter to me" (% agree)	+2.8%	−0.4%	−1.0%	−5.9%	−6.1%

NorStat for Persuasion UK, April 2025, RCT experiment, n=7,000 UK voters.

Acknowledged limitations

- One flaw with the experiment is that some treatments were video and some were text. The text treatments potentially had an advantage in that they required less engagement/attention of respondents than clicking and listening to/watching a video. At the same time, though, videos have an advantage of being more vivid to those who do engage with them.

  One other thing to note is the NHS related video featured the Labour brand while others did not.

- This experiment tests these messages in a controlled environment - obviously it cannot capture ways in which the messages may 'go wrong' in real life, eg does anti-Trump messages lead to higher tariffs which Govt gets punished for, do anti-corporate messages deter growth which likewise voters punish parties for?, etc.

- This tests at a general population level - the sub-samples are not big enough to analyse very specific swing groups.

Conclusions

- All caveats aside, the message which tied Reform/Farage to corporate interests was the most damaging for them in this experiment, suggesting that raising the salience of economic conflict harms Reform. This supports wider research findings of Persuasion UK.

- Reminding people of Farage's proximity to Trump is the second most negatively impactful message. Trump and Musk remain very unpopular with potential swing voters to Reform.

- The deportation video did not appear to change much other than slightly spiking the salience of the issue, albeit the effect size is small. This finding is generally supported by the wider political science literature.

Thanks!

Steven.Akehurst@persuasionuk.org

X: @SteveAkehurst