

Austen Morgan: Farage returns to Parliament stronger than before

🕒 September 1, 2026 | Dr Austen Morgan | [Comment](#)

Dr Austen Morgan is a barrister at 33 Bedford Row Chambers. His next book is: Bringing Boris Down: the politicisation of the civil service, forthcoming.

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Having resigned as the MP for the constituency, Nigel Farage won the Clacton by-election on 13 August 2026. .

The leader of Reform UK had attracted much negative comment, but also some positive analysis – including from me. But is he now weaker, or stronger, in the fight he has picked with the House of Commons, where his eight MPs are cold-shouldered?

Two numbers from the contest, in which there were 34 mainly independent candidates, are crucial – though they go in opposite directions.

First, count Binface's 9,455 votes. This means in theory that, if there were to be a recall petition – requiring the support of ten per cent of the electorate (which was 7,825 in the 2024 general election) – the parliamentarians could force Farage into a second by-election. That assumes the *Binface-ites* are simply and consistently anti-Farage.

Second, Farage's own 22,239 votes. In the 2024 general election, with a turnout of 59 per cent, he secured 21,225 votes. In the by-election, with a turnout of 44 per cent (a very respectable figure, I might add), Farage put on another 1,014 votes, making this a remarkable result. True, the Westminster parties had boycotted the poll, but this was summer holiday time. The figure suggests that Farage could win a second, forced by-election, even – or indeed especially – with a unified parliamentary candidate against him.

By-elections will be concentrating minds in the Palace of Westminster, with normal business due to resume tomorrow. While Count Binface will affirm the idea of a recall petition, Farage's electioneering over the summer might impress politicians and others with their recently acquired additional difficulty: why force a by-election which he will, ultimately, only win again?

Daniel Greenberg, the Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards, will resume his investigation of the £5 million gift from Christopher Harborne, the benefits in kind which were provided by George Cottrell and anything else anybody throws at Farage. This could take some time.

Greenberg will also have to take a preliminary view of Farage's legal defence: the code of conduct '*does not seek to regulate what Members do in their purely private and personal lives*'. The precedents, such as they are, are not helpful to Farage.

Greenberg will then report to the Committee on Standards. This does include seven lay members, recruited by open competition. These worthies have tended to sit out political conflicts.

The Standards Committee's magnificent seven – two Conservatives (including tl

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chair, Alberto Costa), four Labour and one Liberal Democrat MP – are all sworn political opponents of Reform UK, even if they swear to leave their political loyalties at the door of the committee room. *Anything* could happen with Farage.

Finally – and this will be well into 2027 if there is no snap election – there is the independent expert panel, with more worthies, chaired by Sir Adrian Fulford, a retired court of appeal judge. The panel is constitutionally prohibited from judicially reviewing parliament, and, on the facts and the law, it is more likely than not to uphold the MPs ruling.

Nigel Farage – thus answering my question – returns from Clacton politically stronger, and deserves credit, as a good populist, for reading his electorate correctly.

But he faces a series of political challenges, all lined up at the same time: a new labour prime minister, running on tactics, and stroking a parliamentary party that is dominated by the northern queens; Kemi Badenoch, polling well personally, with an albatross of a party round her neck; events, dear boy, events, including fellow populists in Europe facing their own elections, and, at home – *he hasn't gone away you know* – , Rupert Lowe and Restore Britain, proving that right sectarians are even more silly than their leftwing opposites.

In this political menu *à la carte*, Farage has chosen, as his main course, the Standards Committee of the House of Commons – to entertain us over the next year or so.

The ripple of standards through government, as a new political morality, dates from the 1990s, and Lord Nolan, a Catholic Law Lord. It has progressed, in the world of bureaucrats and quangocrats, but it may have reached its limits in the idea that parliament, peopled by MPs and peers, is still the 'high court' of Parliament.

Will Chairman Costa and his standards' colleagues sit in judgment on Nigel Farage's boozy hinterland, now including matters of Ann Widdecombe's life and death? Or will the great south Londoner (and Kent wannabe) outwit the standards' commissars as Lilliputian MPs trying to see off a political threat?

The struggle promises to be no less significant than that between Boris Johnson and the privileges committee, in 2022-23 – which he condemned as a 'kangaroo court' before resigning as a MP.



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JGUK 2d

This whole thing is a farce. How can Farage expect a fair unbiased hearing when hes up against people who hate him.
The establishment are doing their utmost to get rid of him. This time they wont win, because we can all see whats really going on. Farage is a lot tougher than Boris. This kangaroo court needs to drop this waste of time and money. Farage will get elected again, they wont stop him. All their dirty tricks will be exposed, people dont like bullies.

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AD

Arthur Daly → JGUK 1d

Indeed, its an establishment conspiracy to try and use the old trick of throw lots of mud hoping some sticks, but they tried that when they tried to debank him and came unstuck. as to the fact that the "jury" in these cases are MP's from other parties its the exact same stitch up they did to Boris Johnson.

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ColinSmith 2d

Someone on here said that Farage's ReformUK was the Conservative Party he always wanted. I'd agree with that.

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AD

Arthur Daly → ColinSmith 1d

Yes a real one not a load playing at Lib Dems

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AC

Angus Cowan → ColinSmith 2d

I think a couple of people, including me, have said that.

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DH

David Hicks 3d

Yes this story will run and run and keep Farage's £5m bung in the news. It won't damage his popularity with his base, but will harden the not Reform vote. His blokey man of the people act and anti=Establishment rhetoric will look increasingly hypocritical.

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MD

Matthew Daley 3d

This is a crassly silly piece. If Farage was in a strong position he would not have called a by election in the first place - would he? He comes back re-elected having postponed his date with the Parliamentary Standards Committee having tried to intimidate them with a by election where he beat a Bin - of course he is weaker than he was. What's more Reform are slipping in the polls - his former mate Rupert Lowe is kicking lumps out of him. All I can say is that I hope that Nigel Farage has better advice than Dr Morgan offers before he goes in front of Mr Greenberg. The idea that after nearly 40 years we want to go back to a less transparent system is well nuts. His comment about Lord Nolan 'a Catholic Law Lord' is so silly, so out of place it amuses this Catholic albeit my sense of Catholic guilt thinks I should worry about a man who writes such a foolishly inept piece. Dire.

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C **CvM**  Matthew Daley 3d

I disagree. Having increased his votes on a much reduced turnout he's made it clear he will win any further contest. So do the other parties, if an opportunity arises (which Farage will milk), provoke another by election and get trounced or not and look chicken?

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MJ

Matthew Jeffery 3d

Austen, Farage undoubtedly returns to Parliament personally strengthened by the Clacton result. But I think the more interesting question is whether **Reform itself is now weakening around him.**

Today's polling should make Conservatives sit up. A new More in Common poll has Labour on **26%, Conservatives 23% and Reform 22%**. That puts the Conservatives ahead of Reform for the first time in more than 500 days, while Reform has fallen to its lowest level in that poll for around 18 months.

One poll is one poll, and nobody sensible should declare victory. But the dire

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fascinating. Earlier this year Reform looked capable of swallowing the Conservative Party. Now the Reform bubble appears to be bursting, or at the very least leaking badly.

There is a reason. Protest is easier than government. Immigration gave Reform an enormous opening because Conservatives catastrophically failed to control it. But eventually voters ask what comes next. Where is the credible economic programme? How does Reform cut taxes while entertaining expensive state interventions? Who

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B

Bob Matthew Jeff... 2d

I take your point, Matthew, but wouldn't set much store on More in Common polls as far as Reform are concerned.

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MD

Matthew Daley Matthew Jeff... 3d

The piece is hilariously fanciful and silly

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JG

Jack Graham 3d

"This does include seven lay members, recruited by open competition. "

Open competition you are having a laugh. The seven are selected by the House of Commons Commission which is made up of the Speaker, a couple of his flunkies, and Labour and Conservative MP's. There are only two lay members so they can never outvote the majority Labour and Conservative MP's and their two parliamentary flunkies. The House of Commons Commission and Parliamentary Standards as two bookends, make a kangaroo court the epitome of jurisprudence.

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J

JGUK Jack Graham 2d

Exactly a complete farce and fit up.

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CT

Catherine the First Jack Graham 3d

I wasn't particularly happy when the Privileges Committee gave Boris Johnson a 90 day suspension over the nonsense (my personal opinion) of Partygate Privacy

was the chairman at the time? Labour's Harriet Harman. I found it very difficult to believe that she was unbiased in relation to Johnson.

Still, by that point it was open season all round on Johnson. One way or another the person who led Conservatives to a general election victory was going to be ousted as PM. There was perhaps a hint of poetic justice that Starmer, who was so smug and self righteous about the removal of Johnson, got turfed out just as unceremoniously after less time as PM.

The Privileges Committee that judged Johnson was made up entirely of MPs, all political. The Standards Committee does include lay members, but it's likely to be political too. But Parliament is made up of MPs, it is political. They run their rules. Is it justice as we would expect in our legal system? I don't think so. It's MPs being political. But there it is.

edited

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CT

Catherine the First 3d

Farage will win Clacton as many times as necessary, it's the safest Reform seat there is. It was the only seat UKIP ever won in a general election (2015).

But it won't be Count Binface he will need to worry about in a recall by election, it will be Rupert Lowe who will mobilise all the efforts he can for Restore to challenge Farage from the right flank. Lowe's party won't win, but he could undermine Farage's right wing credentials by being more radical and purist.

Outside Clacton, opinions of Farage are much more divided. The latest leader favourability poll shows 27% in favour (consistent with Reform's polling figures) but 50% negative. Views will vary if Farage is found to have broken parliamentary rules over the £5 million "gift". I don't think it will affect his standing in Clacton, but there will be those who do think it was "off" and it might heat up the tactical vote against Reform.

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JG

Jack Graham ➔ Catherine the... 3d

Lowe will be back in the Conservative Party, if he ever left by then.

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C

CvM ➔ Catherine the... 3d

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Interesting and I think valid point that Lowe could use the next by election for lots of publicity. The other main parties would have to stand or look silly, for them a lose-lose



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