



Keir Starmer

Sir Keir Rodney Starmer^[a] (born 2 September 1962) is a British politician and lawyer who has served as Prime Minister of the United Kingdom since 2024 and as Leader of the Labour Party since 2020. He previously served as Leader of the Opposition from 2020 to 2024. He has been Member of Parliament (MP) for Holborn and St Pancras since 2015, and was Director of Public Prosecutions from 2008 to 2013.

Born in Southwark, London and raised in Surrey, Starmer attended Reigate Grammar School. He was politically active as a teenager, and graduated with a Bachelor of Laws degree from the University of Leeds in 1985 and received a postgraduate Bachelor of Civil Law degree from the University of Oxford where he was a student at St Edmund Hall in 1986. After being called to the Bar, Starmer worked predominantly in criminal defence, specialising in human rights. He served as a human rights adviser to the Northern Ireland Policing Board, taking silk as a Queen's Counsel in 2002. During his tenure as Director of Public Prosecutions and Head of the Crown Prosecution Service he handled a number of major cases, including the Stephen Lawrence murder case. In the 2014 New Year Honours, he was appointed a Knight Commander of the Order of the Bath (KCB) for "services to law and criminal justice".

Starmer says his work in Northern Ireland influenced his decision to pursue a political career. He was elected to the House of Commons in the 2015 general election. He supported the Remain campaign in the 2016 European Union membership referendum and advocated a proposed second referendum on Brexit. He served in Jeremy Corbyn's Shadow Cabinet as Shadow Brexit Secretary, and following Corbyn's resignation after Labour's defeat at the 2019 general election, Starmer succeeded him by winning the 2020 leadership election. As Leader of the Opposition he moved Labour towards the political centre and emphasised the elimination of antisemitism within the party, and his party made

The Right Honourable

Sir Keir Starmer

KCB KC MP



Official portrait, 2024

<u>Prime Minister of the United Kingdom</u>	
<u>Incumbent</u>	
Assumed office	
5 July 2024	
Monarch	<u>Charles III</u>
Deputy	<u>Angela Rayner</u> <u>David Lammy</u>
Preceded by	<u>Rishi Sunak</u>
<u>Leader of the Opposition</u>	
In office	
4 April 2020 – 5 July 2024	
Monarchs	<u>Elizabeth II</u> <u>Charles III</u>
Prime Minister	<u>Boris Johnson</u> <u>Liz Truss</u> <u>Rishi Sunak</u>
Deputy	<u>Angela Rayner</u>
Preceded by	<u>Jeremy Corbyn</u>

Starmer led Labour to a landslide victory at the 2024 general election, ending fourteen years of Conservative government with the smallest vote share of any majority government since record-keeping began in 1830. Under Starmer's premiership, the government has announced changes to the planning system and to workers' and renters' rights, an increase in the minimum wage, and investment in a new nuclear power station at Sizewell C. It has ended certain winter fuel payments for around 10 million pensioners, implemented an early-release scheme for thousands of prisoners to decrease prison overcrowding, and settled a number of public sector strikes. Starmer announced a Border Security Command to replace the Rwanda asylum plan and a National Violent Disorder Programme in response to the 2024 riots. He has negotiated free trade deals with the EU, the US and India. In foreign policy, he has continued support for Ukraine in the Russia-Ukraine war and continued support for Israel in the Gaza war, while calling for a ceasefire and the release of hostages and formally recognising the State of Palestine. He also negotiated the transfer of the Chagos Islands to Mauritius following an International Court of Justice ruling, estimated to cost the UK more than £3 billion over 99 years.

Starmer's first speech as Prime Minister
Recorded 5 July 2024

Keir Rodney Starmer was born on 2 September 1962, in Southwark, south east London,^{[1][2][3]} and raised in Oxted, Surrey.^{[4][5][6]} He was the second of the four children of Josephine (née Baker), a nurse, and Rodney Starmer, a toolmaker.^{[6][7]} His mother developed Still's disease.^{[8][2]} His mother attended St John's Anglican Church in nearby Hurst Green, while his father was an atheist.^[9] In 2020, Starmer said his "parents' family" was Jewish. On many other occasions, he said his wife's family was Jewish and his children were being raised Jewish.^[10] He was nominally "brought up Church of England".^[11] His parents were both Labour Party supporters, and reputedly named him after the party's first parliamentary leader, Keir Hardie,^{[12][13]} although Starmer did not confirm this when asked in 2015.^[14]

Starmer passed the 11-plus examination and gained entry to Reigate Grammar School, which at the time was a voluntary-aided selective grammar school.^{[1][13]} The school converted into an independent fee-paying school in 1976, while he was a student. The terms of the conversion were such that his parents were not required to pay for his schooling until he turned 16, and when he reached that point, the school, by now a charity, awarded him a bursary that allowed him to complete his education there without any parental contribution.^{[15][16][17]} The subjects he chose to study in the sixth form during his last two years at school were mathematics, music and physics, in which he achieved A level grades of B, B and C.^[18] Among his classmates at Reigate were the musician Norman Cook (Fatboy Slim), with whom Starmer took violin lessons; Andrew Cooper, who later became a Conservative peer, and the future conservative journalist Andrew Sullivan. According to Starmer, he and Sullivan "fought over everything... Politics, religion.. You name it."^[6]

In his teenage years Starmer was active in Labour Party politics joining the Labour Party Young Socialists at the age of 16.^{[19][6]} He won a junior exhibition from the Guildhall School of Music and Drama where he played the flute, piano, recorder and violin until the age of 18.^[20] In the early 1980s Starmer was caught by police illegally selling ice creams while trying to raise money during a holiday on the French Riviera. He escaped the incident without punishment, beyond the ice creams being confiscated.^{[21][22]} The first member of his family to go to university, Starmer read law at the University of Leeds where he became a member of the university's Labour Club before graduating with a first class LLB in 1985.^{[12][23]} He then went up to St Edmund Hall to pursue postgraduate studies in jurisprudence taking a Bachelor of Civil Law (BCL) degree from the University of Oxford in 1986.^{[24][12]}

Legal career

Barrister

Starmer became a barrister in 1987 at the Middle Temple, then a bencher in 2009.^{[1][2]} He served as a legal officer for the campaign group Liberty until 1990.^[12] Starmer was a member of Doughty Street Chambers from 1990 onwards, primarily working on human rights matters.^{[8][12]}

Starmer has been called to the Bar in several Caribbean countries,^[25] where he defended convicts sentenced to the death penalty.^[6] In 1999, he was a junior barrister on Lee Clegg's appeal.^[26] Starmer assisted Helen Steel and David Morris in the McLibel case, at the trial and appeal in English courts, also representing them before the European Court of Human Rights.^[27] Starmer

was appointed Queen's Counsel on 9 April 2002, aged 39.^[28] In the same year, he became joint head of Doughty Street Chambers. In 2005 Starmer called his Queen's Counsel appointment "odd" as he had previously expressed support for the abolition of the monarchy.^[29]

Starmer wrote legal opinions and marched in protest against the Iraq War following the 2003 invasion of Iraq, and said in 2015 that he believed the war was "not lawful under international law because there was no UN resolution expressly authorising it".^{[30][6]} He defended one of the Fairford Five who broke into the RAF Fairford military air base in 2003 and disabled equipment in order to disrupt military operations at the start of the Iraq War.^[31]

Starmer served as a human rights adviser to the Northern Ireland Policing Board and the Association of Chief Police Officers, and was also a member of the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office's Death Penalty Advisory Panel from 2002 to 2008.^{[2][12]} The Northern Ireland Board was an important part of bringing communities together following the Good Friday Agreement, and Starmer later cited his work on policing in Northern Ireland as being a key influence on his decision to pursue a political career: "Some of the things I thought that needed to change in police services we achieved more quickly than we achieved in strategic litigation... I came better to understand how you can change by being inside and getting the trust of people".^[6] Starmer represented Croatia at the genocide hearings before the International Court of Justice at The Hague in 2014, arguing that Serbia wanted to seize a third of Croatian territory during the 1990s war and eradicate the Croatian population.^[32]

Director of Public Prosecutions

In July 2008 Baroness Scotland, the Attorney General for England and Wales, named Starmer as the new Head of the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) and Director of Public Prosecutions (DPP). He succeeded Ken Macdonald, who publicly welcomed Starmer's appointment, on 1 November 2008.^{[12][13]} Starmer was deemed to be bringing a focus on human rights into the legal system.^[12] In 2011 he introduced reforms that included the "first test paperless hearing".^[33] During his time as DPP Starmer dealt with a number of major cases including the Stephen Lawrence murder case, where he brought his murderers to justice.^[34]

In February 2010, Starmer announced the CPS's decision to prosecute three Labour MPs and a Conservative peer for offences relating to false accounting in the aftermath of the parliamentary expenses scandal, who were all found guilty.^{[35][36]} Starmer prioritised rapid prosecutions of rioters over long sentences during the 2011 England riots, which he later concluded helped to bring "the situation back under control".^{[37][38]} In February 2012 Starmer announced that Chris Huhne would be prosecuted for perverting the course of justice, stating in relation to the case that "[w]here there is sufficient evidence we do not shy away from prosecuting politicians".^[39]

In 2012, the journalist Nick Cohen published allegations that Starmer was personally responsible for allowing the prosecution of Paul Chambers to proceed, in what became known as the "Twitter joke trial". The CPS denied that Starmer was behind the decision, saying that it was the responsibility of a Crown Court and was out of Starmer's hands.^[40] When Jimmy Savile's sexual abuse crimes were exposed in 2012, Starmer said amid the subsequent scandal that "It was like a



Official portrait as Director of Public Prosecutions, 2009

dam had bust and people rightfully wanted to know why he had been allowed to get away with it for so long."^[41] In 2013, Starmer announced changes to how sexual abuse investigations were to be handled amid Operation Yewtree, including a panel to review complaints.^{[42][43]}

Starmer stepped down as Director of Public Prosecutions in November 2013, and was succeeded by Alison Saunders.^{[44][45]} Awarded several honorary degrees between 2011 and 2014, Starmer was appointed Knight Commander of the Order of the Bath (KCB) in the 2014 New Year Honours for "services to law and criminal justice".^{[46][47]}

Early political career

Member of Parliament

My predecessor, the Right Hon. Frank Dobson, to whom I pay tribute, was a powerful advocate of the rights of everyone in Holborn and St Pancras throughout his highly distinguished parliamentary career. Widely respected and widely regarded, he served the people of Holborn and St Pancras for 36 years. Although I doubt I will clock up 36 years, I intend to follow in Frank Dobson's footsteps—albeit my jokes are likely to seem tame when compared with his, and I might give the beard a miss.



Official portrait as MP, 2017

—Keir Starmer in his maiden speech to the House of Commons, May 2015

Starmer was selected in December 2014 as the Labour parliamentary candidate for the constituency of Holborn and St Pancras, a Labour safe seat, following the decision of its sitting MP, Frank Dobson, to retire.^[48] Starmer was elected at the 2015 general election with a majority of 17,048 (52.9 per cent).^[49] He was returned at the 2017 general election with an increased majority of 30,509 (70.1 per cent), at the 2019 general election with a reduced majority of 27,763 (64.9 per cent), and at the 2024 general election with a further reduced majority of 18,884 (48.9 per cent), despite a Labour landslide nationally and him becoming prime minister.

During the 2016 European Union membership referendum, Starmer supported the Britain Stronger in Europe campaign for the UK to remain in the European Union (EU).^[50] A member of both parliamentary groups Labour Friends of Israel and Labour Friends of Palestine and the Middle East,^[51] Starmer was urged by a number of activists to stand in the 2015 Labour Party leadership election following the resignation of Ed Miliband as Leader of the Labour Party after Labour's defeat at the 2015 general election; he ruled this out, citing his relative lack of political experience at the time.^{[52][53]} During the leadership election Starmer supported Andy Burnham, who finished second to Jeremy Corbyn.^[54]

Shadow portfolios

Starmer was appointed to Corbyn's Shadow Cabinet as Shadow Home Office Minister in September 2015. He resigned from this role in June 2016 as part of the widespread Shadow Cabinet resignations in protest at Corbyn's leadership following the 2016 EU Referendum result.^{[55][56]} Following Corbyn's re-election at the September 2016 leadership election, Starmer accepted a new post from Corbyn as Shadow Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union.^[57] In this role, Starmer questioned Theresa May and HM Government's destination for the UK outside of the EU, as well as calling for Brexit plans to be made public and supporting a proposed Second Referendum on Brexit.^[58] Following defeat at the 2019 general election, Corbyn announced that he would not lead Labour at the next general election after "a process of reflection".^[59] Starmer began to distance himself from Corbyn's leadership and many of the policies put forward at the general election, later revealing in 2024 that he was "certain that we would lose the 2019 election".^[60]



Jeremy Corbyn & Starmer, 6 December 2019

Labour leadership bid

On 4 January 2020 Starmer announced his candidacy for the resultant leadership election.^{[61][62]} He gained support from the former Labour prime minister Gordon Brown and London Mayor Sadiq Khan.^[23] During the Labour leadership campaign, Starmer ran a left-wing platform and positioned himself in opposition to austerity, stating that Corbyn was right to position Labour as "the party of anti-austerity".^{[63][64]} He indicated he would continue with the Labour policy of scrapping tuition fees as well as pledging "common ownership" of rail, mail, energy and water companies, and called for ending outsourcing in the NHS, local government and the justice system.^[65] Starmer was declared the winner of Labour's leadership contest on 4 April 2020, defeating his rivals, Rebecca Long-Bailey and Lisa Nandy, with 56.2 per cent of the vote in the first round.^{[66][67][23]}



Starmer's logo for the Labour leadership

It is the honour and the privilege of my life to be elected as Leader of the Labour Party. I want to thank Rebecca and Lisa for running such passionate and powerful campaigns and for their friendship and support along the way. I want to thank our Labour Party staff who worked really hard and my own amazing campaign team, full of positivity, with that unifying spirit. I want to pay tribute to Jeremy Corbyn, who led our party through some really difficult times, who energised our movement and who's a friend as well as a colleague. And to all of our members, supporters and affiliates I say this: whether you voted for me or not I will represent you, I will listen to you and I will bring our party together.

Leader of the Opposition (2020–2024)

Having become Leader of the Opposition during the COVID-19 pandemic, Starmer said in his acceptance speech that he would refrain from "scoring party political points" and would work with the Government "in the national interest".^[68] He later became more critical of HM Government's response to the pandemic following the Partygate scandal.^[69] In May 2022 Starmer said he would resign were he to receive a fixed penalty notice for breaching COVID-19 regulations while campaigning during the run-up to the Hartlepool by-election and local elections the previous year.^[70] The controversy surrounding the event was dubbed "Beergate".^[71] In July 2022 Durham Police cleared Starmer and said that he had "no case to answer".^[72] In August 2022 the Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards, Kathryn Stone, found that Starmer had breached the MPs' code of conduct on eight occasions by failing to register interests.^{[73][74]}



Starmer speaking in the Commons during Prime Minister's Questions, 22 April 2020

Amidst the historic number of ministers resigning from Boris Johnson's government in July 2022, Starmer proposed a vote of no confidence in the Government, stating that Johnson should not be allowed to remain in office.^{[75][76]} Starmer also criticised Johnson, as well as his successors Liz Truss and Rishi Sunak, for issues such as the Chris Pincher scandal and the subsequent government crisis,^[77] the economic crisis resulting from the 2022 mini-budget and subsequent government crisis,^{[78][79][80]} the cost of living crisis,^[81] and the industrial disputes and strikes including National Health Service strikes.^{[82][83][84]}

As Labour leader Starmer focused on repositioning the Party away from the Left and the controversies that affected Corbyn's leadership, with promises of economic stability, tackling small-boat crossings, cutting NHS waiting times and "rebuilding the NHS", worker rights enrichment, energy independence and infrastructure development, tackling crime, improving education and training, reforming public services, renationalising the railway network, and recruiting 6,500 teachers.^[85] Starmer also pledged to end antisemitism within the Labour Party.^{[23][86]} In October 2020, following the release of the Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC)'s report into antisemitism in the Labour Party, Starmer accepted its findings in full and apologised to Jews on the Party's behalf.^{[87][88]} In February 2023 Starmer's antisemitism reforms resulted in the Labour Party no longer being monitored by the EHRC.^[89]

In September 2023 he reshuffled his shadow cabinet.^[90] Starmer was ranked number two in the New Statesman's Left Power List 2023, below his Shadow Chancellor, Rachel Reeves, but still described as "the overwhelming favourite to be the next Prime Minister".^[91] The reshuffle was seen as a promotion of Blairites and demotion of those on the soft left.^{[92][93][94]}

During the 2023 Hamas-Israel War, Starmer emphasised his support for Israel, stated he would favour military aid to the country, and called the actions of Hamas and other militants terrorism.^{[95][96]} In an interview with LBC on 11 October 2023, Starmer was asked whether it would be appropriate for Israel to totally cut off power and water supplies to Gaza, with Starmer

replying that "I think that Israel does have that right" and that "obviously everything should be done within international law".^{[97][98]} On 20 October, Starmer clarified that he only meant that Israel had the right to defend itself.^[99] Starmer had said that a ceasefire would only benefit Hamas for future attacks, instead calling for a humanitarian pause to allow aid to reach Gaza.^[100]

On 15 November 2023 Starmer suffered his largest defeat as leader when 56 of his MPs (including ten frontbenchers) defied a three-line whip in voting for an SNP motion to support an immediate ceasefire in Gaza.^{[101][102]} In December 2023, Keir Starmer followed Rishi Sunak in changing his stance by calling for a "sustainable ceasefire" in relation to the conflict in Gaza. This also came after the Foreign Secretary David Cameron's same change in position. Starmer stated his support for a "two-stage" "two-state solution".^{[103][104][105]} During Starmer's tenure as leader, Labour saw a drop in party membership from a peak of 532,000 after the 2019 election to 370,450 in the runup to the 2024 election.^[106] More than 20,000 members left the party within two months in 2024, with blame placed on the party's stance on the Gazan genocide and green investment.^[107]

Shadow cabinet

Starmer's shadow cabinet initially comprised both the right and left of the Labour Party. Starmer reshuffled his shadow cabinet three times – firstly in May 2021, secondly in November 2021, and finally in September 2023.^{[108][109]} Starmer's reshuffles reduced the representation of the left and soft left on the opposition frontbench, while increasing the representation of the party's right.^{[110][111][112][113]} Notable changes included Rachel Reeves replacing Anneliese Dodds as Shadow Chancellor, the demotion of Lisa Nandy from Shadow Levelling-Up Secretary to Shadow Minister for International Development, and the replacement of Chief Whip Nick Brown with Alan Campbell. Resignations from Starmer's shadow cabinet included Andy McDonald and Rosena Allin-Khan.

Local election results

Starmer considered resigning after Labour's mixed results in the 2021 local elections, the first local elections of his leadership, but later felt "vindicated" by his decision to stay on, saying "I did [consider quitting] because I didn't feel that I should be bigger than the party and that if I couldn't bring about the change, perhaps there should be a change. But actually, in the end, I reflected on it, talked to very many people and doubled down and determined, no, it is the change in the Labour Party we need".^[114]

During Starmer's tenure as Opposition Leader, his party suffered the loss of a previously safe Labour seat at the 2021 Hartlepool by-election, followed by holds at the 2021 Batley and Spen by-election, 2022 Birmingham Erdington by-election and 2022 City of Chester by-election, as well as a gain from the Conservatives at the 2022 Wakefield by-election. During the 2023 local elections, Labour gained more than 500 councillors and 22 councils, becoming the largest party in local government for the first time since 2002.^[115] Labour made further gains at the 2024 local elections, gaining from the Conservatives at the Blackpool South by-election and narrowly winning the West Midlands mayoral election.^[116]

2024 general election

On 22 May 2024 Prime Minister Rishi Sunak announced that a general election would be held on 4 July 2024. Labour entered the general election with a large lead over the Conservatives in opinion polls (which had been the case since 2022), and the potential scale of the party's victory remained a topic of discussion throughout the campaign.^{[117][118]}

In June 2024 Starmer released the Labour Party's 2024 manifesto, *Change*, which focused on economic growth, planning system reforms, infrastructure, what Starmer describes as "clean energy", healthcare, education, childcare, and strengthening workers' rights.^{[119][120]} It pledged a new publicly owned energy company (Great British Energy), a "Green Prosperity Plan", reducing patient waiting times in the NHS, and renationalisation of the railway network (Great British Railways).^[121] Promising wealth creation together with "pro-business and pro-worker" policies,^[122] the manifesto also pledged giving 16-year-olds the vote, reforming the House of Lords, and to tax private schools, with money generated going into improving state education.^{[123][124]} On taxes, the day after the manifesto was released, Starmer pledged that not only would income tax, National Insurance, and VAT not be increased, but that, per their manifesto, their plans were fully costed and funded and would not require tax increases.^[125]

Starmer led Labour to a landslide victory at the general election, ending fourteen years of Conservative government with Labour becoming the largest party in the House of Commons.^[126] Labour achieved a 174-seat simple majority and a total of 411 seats, the party's third-best result in terms of seat-share following the 1997 and 2001 general elections. The party became the largest in England for the first time since 2005, in Scotland for the first time since 2010 and retained its status as the largest party in Wales.^[127] Despite this, Labour won 34 per cent of the vote – the lowest of any party forming a majority government in the post-war era,^[128] leading to concerns about the proportionality of the election.^{[129][130]}

In his victory speech Starmer thanked Labour Party workers for their work – including nearly five years of revamping and rebranding Labour in the face of Conservative dominance – and urged them to savour the moment, but warned them of challenges ahead and pledged his government would seek "national renewal".^{[131][132]}

We did it! You campaigned for it, you fought for it, you voted for it and now it has arrived. Change begins now. And it feels good, I have to be honest. Four-and-a-half years of work changing the party. This is what it is for – a changed Labour Party ready to serve our country, ready to restore Britain to the service of working people. And across our country people will be waking up to the news, relieved that a weight has been lifted, a burden finally removed from the shoulders of this great nation. And now we can look forward. Walk into the morning, the sunlight of hope, pale at first but getting stronger through the day, shining once again, on a country with the opportunity after 14 years to get its future back. We said we would end the chaos and we will. We said we would turn the page and we have. Today we start the next chapter, begin the work of change, the mission of national renewal and start to rebuild our country.