# Reform UK surges as voters grow scunnered in Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse byelection



The upcoming byelection for the Scottish Parliament seat of Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse, sparked by the passing of SNP MSP Christina McKelvie, is shaping up to be a more complex contest than previously anticipated. Traditionally viewed as a two-horse race between the Scottish National Party (SNP) and Scottish Labour, recent sentiments gathered from local voters indicate a discernible shift in the political winds. According to focus group findings conducted by public opinion researchers More in Common, the interest level for Reform UK is noticeably rising, reflecting what can be termed a "scunner" factor—an increasing dissatisfaction with established political options.

Voters in the area, an amalgamation of post-industrial towns with deep-rooted sectarian divisions, are questioning whether it is time to explore alternatives. Karen, a nurse from Larkhall, expressed her curiosity about the number of votes Reform UK may secure, suggesting that the party's rising presence could surprise many in Scotland. The candidacy of Ross Lambie, formerly a Conservative, has also elevated Reform's profile in this key constituency. This movement comes in the wake of the party's notable successes in recent English council elections and a general discontent toward both the SNP and Labour. The latter party has seen its momentum wane after the last general election and continues to grapple with the unpopularity of certain Westminster policies.

Liam, an accountant from Stonehouse, revealed a deeper reservation about his historical party affiliations, stating, “I’ve always been a SNP and a Labour voter, but I’m running out of options now. Is Reform the change that’s needed?” His sentiment reflects a growing weariness with conventional political choices, a concern echoed by many locals. Jamie, a service engineer, is also willing to consider voting Reform, highlighting a shift in priorities despite his reservations about the party’s controversial leader, Nigel Farage.

The evolving landscape of Hamilton, Larkhall, and Stonehouse is compounded by its socio-political fabric, which has faced challenges linked to sectarian divides and a troubled socio-economic backdrop. Community figures like Fiona Dryburgh, CEO of the Machan Trust, voice concerns that years of progress on anti-sectarian efforts are being unpicked by the new wave of populist rhetoric spurred by Reform UK. She noted the troubling instances that have emerged in local children's clubs, highlighting how political divisions are trickling down to the youngest community members. "Parents are having fights about it on Facebook, then their kids bring it into groups," she remarked, raising alarms about the potential ramifications of political discourse on community cohesion.

This voter disillusionment could play a significant role in the byelection's outcome. While Swinney, the current SNP leader, acknowledges the implications of voter frustration, Anas Sarwar of Scottish Labour views the byelection as a critical “launchpad” for revitalising party support ahead of future elections. However, some Labour insiders express private dismay at the upsurge in support for Reform, particularly given the electorate's focus on local issues such as winter fuel payments, which are frequently raised at the doors during canvassing.

Amidst the rising tide of Reform UK, their leader Farage has defended claims made by the party, particularly against accusations of sectarianism. He argues that their advertisements merely highlight statements from their opponents, prompting reactions from Scottish politicians who feel undermined by misrepresentations. Recent specific incidents, including the controversial advertisement regarding Sarwar’s views on community priorities, underscore the challenges all parties face in a rapidly changing political climate.

As the election looms, canvassers across the board report a palpable shift in how voters are positioning themselves, shifting toward more comfortable expressions of support for Reform. This byelection, set for 5 June, thus appears poised to not only impact local dynamics but may also signal broader implications for the Scottish political landscape leading up to Holyrood 2026. A potential Reform UK gain would herald a significant shift in the electorate’s expectations, creating ripples far beyond the immediate contest.

With the final canvassing stretch underway, the stakes are high for all parties involved, each gearing up to engage an increasingly disenchanted electorate. As Sara, a local voter, aptly summarised: “I think, undoubtedly, that people are scunnered with politics … Many people are looking at the most reactive option.” This captures the essence of a moment in Scottish politics that could redefine the traditional power structures that have dominated for decades.

## Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2025/may/27/scunner-factor-reform-holyrood-byelection-hamilton-larkhall-stonehouse-snp-scottish-labour), [[2]](https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2025/may/27/scunner-factor-reform-holyrood-byelection-hamilton-larkhall-stonehouse-snp-scottish-labour)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2025/may/27/scunner-factor-reform-holyrood-byelection-hamilton-larkhall-stonehouse-snp-scottish-labour), [[3]](https://www.scotsman.com/news/politics/anas-sarwar-scottish-labour-hamilton-larkhall-and-stonehouse-by-election-5099963), [[4]](https://www.grampianonline.co.uk/news/national/reform-uk-announces-candidate-for-holyrood-by-election-131993/)
* Paragraph 3 – [[1]](https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2025/may/27/scunner-factor-reform-holyrood-byelection-hamilton-larkhall-stonehouse-snp-scottish-labour), [[2]](https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2025/may/27/scunner-factor-reform-holyrood-byelection-hamilton-larkhall-stonehouse-snp-scottish-labour), [[6]](https://www.irishtimes.com/world/uk/2025/05/02/nigel-farages-reform-uk-beats-labour-by-six-votes-in-runcorn-and-helsby-byelection/)
* Paragraph 4 – [[1]](https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2025/may/27/scunner-factor-reform-holyrood-byelection-hamilton-larkhall-stonehouse-snp-scottish-labour), [[2]](https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2025/may/27/scunner-factor-reform-holyrood-byelection-hamilton-larkhall-stonehouse-snp-scottish-labour), [[5]](https://www.holyrood.com/news/view%2Chamilton-larkhall-and-stonehouse-byelection-date-confirmed)
* Paragraph 5 – [[2]](https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2025/may/27/scunner-factor-reform-holyrood-byelection-hamilton-larkhall-stonehouse-snp-scottish-labour), [[1]](https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2025/may/27/scunner-factor-reform-holyrood-byelection-hamilton-larkhall-stonehouse-snp-scottish-labour)
* Paragraph 6 – [[1]](https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2025/may/27/scunner-factor-reform-holyrood-byelection-hamilton-larkhall-stonehouse-snp-scottish-labour), [[2]](https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2025/may/27/scunner-factor-reform-holyrood-byelection-hamilton-larkhall-stonehouse-snp-scottish-labour), [[7]](https://www.irishtimes.com/world/uk/2025/05/02/nigel-farages-reform-uk-lives-up-to-the-hype-trouncing-labour-and-tories-in-local-election-votes/)
* Paragraph 7 – [[1]](https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2025/may/27/scunner-factor-reform-holyrood-byelection-hamilton-larkhall-stonehouse-snp-scottish-labour), [[3]](https://www.scotsman.com/news/politics/anas-sarwar-scottish-labour-hamilton-larkhall-and-stonehouse-by-election-5099963), [[5]](https://www.holyrood.com/news/view%2Chamilton-larkhall-and-stonehouse-byelection-date-confirmed)

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## Bibliography

1. <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2025/may/27/scunner-factor-reform-holyrood-byelection-hamilton-larkhall-stonehouse-snp-scottish-labour> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2025/may/27/scunner-factor-reform-holyrood-byelection-hamilton-larkhall-stonehouse-snp-scottish-labour> - An article from The Guardian discussing the upcoming Holyrood by-election in Hamilton, Larkhall, and Stonehouse, Scotland. It highlights the growing support for Reform UK, particularly since their success in the English council elections, and the potential impact on the traditional two-party race between the SNP and Scottish Labour. The piece also touches upon voter dissatisfaction, referred to as the 'scunner' factor, and the influence of sectarian divisions in the area.
3. <https://www.scotsman.com/news/politics/anas-sarwar-scottish-labour-hamilton-larkhall-and-stonehouse-by-election-5099963> - An article from The Scotsman featuring Scottish Labour leader Anas Sarwar discussing the Hamilton, Larkhall, and Stonehouse by-election. Sarwar views the by-election as a 'launchpad' for forming a Scottish Labour government in the next election. The article also mentions the significance of the by-election in the Central Belt industrial heartland and its potential impact on the Scottish political landscape.
4. <https://www.grampianonline.co.uk/news/national/reform-uk-announces-candidate-for-holyrood-by-election-131993/> - A report from Grampian Online announcing that Reform UK has selected Councillor Ross Lambie as their candidate for the Hamilton, Larkhall, and Stonehouse by-election. Lambie, who previously represented the Clydesdale South ward on South Lanarkshire Council, defected from the Conservatives to Reform UK earlier this year. The article includes a statement from Lambie expressing his commitment to improving the lives of local residents.
5. <https://www.holyrood.com/news/view%2Chamilton-larkhall-and-stonehouse-byelection-date-confirmed> - An article from Holyrood confirming the date for the Hamilton, Larkhall, and Stonehouse by-election, set for the first week of June. The by-election was triggered by the death of SNP MSP Christina McKelvie. The piece mentions the candidates announced by the SNP and Labour parties and notes that other parties have yet to name their candidates.
6. <https://www.irishtimes.com/world/uk/2025/05/02/nigel-farages-reform-uk-beats-labour-by-six-votes-in-runcorn-and-helsby-byelection/> - An article from The Irish Times reporting on Reform UK's narrow victory over Labour in the Runcorn and Helsby by-election. The piece highlights the slim margin of just six votes and discusses the implications of this result for Prime Minister Keir Starmer's government, noting that it was the first full-scale electoral test of his leadership.
7. <https://www.irishtimes.com/world/uk/2025/05/02/nigel-farages-reform-uk-lives-up-to-the-hype-trouncing-labour-and-tories-in-local-election-votes/> - An article from The Irish Times detailing Reform UK's strong performance in local and mayoral elections in England, including their victory in the Runcorn and Helsby by-election. The piece discusses the party's rise in popularity and the challenges faced by traditional parties like Labour and the Conservatives.